

Demon Lord,

Author: Kurone Kanzaki
Illustrator: Makoto Iino

Retry!



VISIT...

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DEMON
LORD,
RETRY!







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Going for the top with all I've got...

Maybe I can do that, like, twice in my life.

Why twice?

So I have another chance to clock the bastard in the face.

...Akira Ono, *Memorial*

x/x/2001 Sunny

...XX has joined.

...Akira Ono has joined.

"Another day, another pile of bodies. What do you think, Akira? Like 200?"

"Yeah. A pretty good start."

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony. Only two held the key to this chatroom. They had lost one already, making them a duo.

"Like I'm the one to talk, but this game's legit problematic."

"There are serious complaints that accuse the game of creating serial killers."

"For real!? Wow, this country's gotten PC. Tightened up its asshole... Went a little too far at the Kegal Gym..."

"Drop the disgusting metaphors."

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony. XXX was gone. Because XXX...

"But what's the point in smoking so many of them every day? I'm having fun, so no complaints here, but do you want to farm serial killers?"

"Of course not. Haven't you heard? Kill one, and you're a murderer. Kill a million and you're a hero."

"Huh? So you want to be a hero?"

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony. A digital space. Population, 2. No one else would enter here again.

“Hero? No thanks. What I want is for every player in Japan to fear me... To call me ‘Demon Lord’.”

In a video game, of course. Detached from reality.

“Uh huh. I believe in you, Akira. Yep. I think you’ll make your... dream?... come true.

“You... You’re making fun of me.”

“Oh no, not at all. I’ll just remind you of your hilarious Demon Lord dream a few years down the road.”

“What the... You douche.”

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony.

Thud thud thud thud. The massacre symphony.

Chapter One: Enter the Demon Lord

Midnight of Beginning

—Dive into the Game—

The year is 2XXX on the Empire calendar.

The nation known as the Empire, which now held most of the world under its control, commenced a heinous game. In order to solidify its oppression of the nations it had conquered, and to stomp out any chance of revolutions, the Empire grandiosely hosted a cruel show. The show, which could only be described as pure madness, was a fight to the death comprised of randomly selected players from each nation under the Empire’s control, with only one survivor. The Empire broadcasted this game around the world, hosting an official death pool. Who would survive until the end? Who would be killed last? Who would be killed first? The cruel, yet vibrantly real, show had transcended film and other forms of fiction. It captured the hearts of the citizens of the Empire (God’s People).

The game, broadcast throughout the world, depicted countless dramas and tragedies. The viewers witnessed humanity at its bare-bones: participants killing strangers just to survive. The game was given many names: The Human Race, The Game of Life, Fable of the Onion... The exorbitant amount of wagers poured into the game by the world’s bored 1% eventually turned into vital income for the Empire. The citizens of the world awaited the selection process in fear, and God’s People were entertained in a stupor of madness. The Infinity Game. The lone survivor of each game was awarded with immeasurable wealth... And the privilege to join the ranks of God’s People. All other contestants, however, were awarded with death. Without exception.

† † †

Japan, 2016 CE...

“I remember this event...”

Now, a man was participating in the same terrifying Game. Only without a trace of cowardice or fear on his face. His name was Akira Ono... A perfectly average, working Joe. Akira knew this place like the back of his hand: he was the very man who ran the game. There was nothing to fear when he knew every inch of the arena. Moreover, it was all within a computer screen. None of it would affect reality.

“This hobby lasted longer than I thought,” he said to himself in a faint whisper. This video game had started in 2001, around the dawn of the internet renaissance. The current year was 2016. The passage of fifteen years had qualified this game as an antique. And today, the curtains were about to close on it. Typing away at the keyboard or flourishing his mouse from time to time, Akira flipped through various screens. He didn’t seem to have a particular purpose for doing this except to try and commit everything in sight to memory.

(...It’s almost midnight.)

Normally, that was when the Game would commence. But Akira was the only one in the arena right now. At midnight, the servers would expire, obliterating the arena. He had chosen a solitary farewell, rather than a festive one.

(Fifteen years was way too long...)

A game that outlasted some children’s K-12 education was outlandish. In fact, the kids who were in middle school at the game’s launch were now proud members of the workforce. Some were now married. Some were now parents. Some have moved overseas. Each of them had lost free time as they gained responsibilities... In a sense, they had lived healthy lives.

Akira was no exception, either. He used to lose himself in modifying the game as he pleased, and would stay up through the night to run it. Through the years, Akira moved up the ladder, until the majority of his life was taken up by his work.

“Where to go next...?”

He logged in as the character that could be considered the final boss of the game, and strolled through various maps until his time was nearly up. A residential area, a remote temple, a deep and dark pond, and more... Each and every location held a special meaning for him.

23:58:20

“Thanks for everything, Kunai.”

Akira spoke to his character on the screen. If anyone was watching, they might have been a little creeped out. On his screen, there was a man with hair long enough to touch his shoulders. Although way into his forties, the man was built and toned to the max. Sharp, to no end. A high-ranking officer of the Empire, and the man behind the infamous Game itself... According to his backstory, anyway. His name was Hakuto Kunai, The Demon Lord of the Empire — the man responsible for spilling the blood and reaping the tragedy of 4,143,792 participants of the Game. Even at the brink of doomsday, his eyes gleamed of cruelty above his same old icy smile. Akira felt a slight shiver looking at Kunai.

“I never would have guessed... I’d be spending the last moments with you.”

Akira said, as if to deflect Kunai’s piercing stare. Still, Kunai’s expression remained unchanged. Which was no surprise. He was merely an NPC, who would never come to life unless someone was pulling his strings. Despite that fact, Akira continued in a fluster, as if he was trying to escape something.

“What? You’re sulking? Just so you know, it doesn’t matter one bit that you’re the final boss, or that you’re the Demon Lord. Real life always wins. If you’re not done playing, it’s all on you... I’m going to bed. I’ve got an early morning.”

23:59:50

“See you, Kunai. And, goodnight... XXXXXXXXXX”

00:00:00

Hiroshi closed his eyes with a thousand thoughts whirling behind them. When he opened them again... he saw the Great Forest in front of him.

A world forsaken by God, where angels despair.

Don’t be surprised.

And listen.

Listen carefully, and you should hear it.

The midnight bell's toll always sings of new beginnings.

The Great Forest

(What the...?)

Akira Ono fell speechless gazing upon the expansive, overgrown forest in front of him. He couldn't help but chuckle at such a sight. Sure, his hobby of fifteen years was coming to an end, and he had been drinking a little, but not enough to hallucinate being thrown into the Great Forest. More importantly, he had to go to work the next day.

"The Great Forest is really... well, green."

Recently, he had been circling his office, home, and XX. The brilliant, verdant forest almost stung his eyes. He would have been grateful to be reminded of the majesty of nature in the midst of his day-to-day life, but he had tomorrow to worry about. If he were to sleep through the night in front of the PC monitor again, he would undoubtedly be sore and miserable the next day.

"Such a vivid dream, though. It almost seems real..."

Closing his eyes, he could feel the rays of sunshine and hear the dragonflies and cicadas flying around him. Looking in the distance, he could even spot a glimmering lake. Akira cracked a grin, remembering that he had somewhere heard the phrase "dreams are reflections of desires." Perhaps his subconscious mind was craving a leisurely walk in the woods, away from all of the stress.

As he took a step forward in the direction of the lake, a drop of cold sweat trickled down his back.

"What are on my feet...?"

A pair of expensive leather shoes without so much as a crease. Above them, black slacks ran up his legs, complimented by a black suit. He was even wearing a long, black coat that draped down to his ankles despite the oppressive heat of summer. If a bystander were to take a guess, they probably would have thought Akira was some kind of mafia don.

(It can't be...)

For some time now, his heart had been pounding nervously. When he sprinted toward the lake, he crossed the forest in a flash. Fast as a bullet train. The incredible speed made Akira only more nervous. As soon as he looked down at the water to see himself... his fear was confirmed.

“Why are you...!”

Through the reflection in the lake, the familiar final boss was looking back at Akira. The Demon Lord of the Empire, who sentenced countless players to their despair. The very character Akira had created within the game. Akira saw a smile on the face in the reflection, as if he found it amusing.

“What the hell...!? How am I... this old man!?”

Akira himself wasn't too much younger than the inferred age of the face he saw, but he was counting on at least another decade or two until he saw this much age in his reflection. Moreover, his other senses were not helping in convincing Akira that this was all a dream. Everything was too real. What crossed his mind was that he had been transported to another world, just like the popular anime nowadays.

The only other theory he could muster up was that he was already dead from a heart attack or something, and he was in the afterlife. Even that theory, however, didn't quite explain why he looked like the Demon Lord.

“H-Hold on... Calm down. It ain't over 'til it's over.”

Akira frantically smacked his cheeks and head to no avail. Every time he breathed, he could feel his very lungs expand, just as they did in real life... to his disappointment. Finally beginning to realize the predicament he was in, Akira screamed internally:

(Nooo! I didn't even get a chance to wipe my hard drive!)

Not a very noble reaction, to say the least, but painfully sincere. If push came to shove, he could accept being sent to another world. But he had never expected to be sent dressed like a member of the yakuza. If he had been at least young and good-looking, or filthy rich, there would have been a silver lining. Akira's face was shaded with a little too much of distinguished senectitude for his taste.

(First I need more information... What's around here...?)

He tried walking around for a while, but it didn't seem like he was waking up anytime soon. On the contrary, his body seemed to settle with every step. By this point, Akira almost felt natural in this body. From time to time, the breath of the forest shook him, as if to prove that the world around him was as real as his own.

(What is this world...? What is this forest...? Give me a hint. Something.)

He rummaged through his pockets, but nothing helpful emerged. There were only numerous knives (the Demon Lord's weapon of choice) laced inside the long coat, along with the cigarettes he always used.

Akira had finally decided the embarrassment was worth it, and to shout *the word*. Mashive, who used to be one of the players, had spoken of this word. A magic word that was critical information in case one was transported to another world. After a deep breath, Akira shouted this word towards the sky...!

"S-Status!"

...Silence filled the forest, followed by the cry of a single crow. Akira waited a while after shouting this alone in the forest, but nothing happened.

"Come on!"

He was hoping for some sort of screen or numbers, but nothing. In fact, the leaves rustling in the wind seemed like they were laughing at him. Catching a second wind, Akira decided to shout a different magic word. He figured that because he was the Demon Lord, because he was Akira Ono, there was another word better suited for him.

"Administrator."

(Bingo!)

Akira couldn't help but shake his fists in the air. A black panel and keyboard had appeared mid-air, showing a screen prompting a password.

"Yes, yes! Who's a good boy...? Enter... password... Huh?"

Mumbling like a dog trainer, Akira cheerfully typed in the password. The instant it was accepted, however, numerous command screens popped up, all

blacked out, preventing him from reading any of it. In front of it, the screen read 'Not all conditions are fulfilled.' His knees faltered, and Akira slumped against the large tree next to him.

"Conditions my ass... What could you possibly want...?"

Without a thought, he had taken out a cigarette and lit it. He proceeded to blow out the familiar smoke, but the comforting sensation further shoved the truth into Akira's face. In what dream could he taste a cigarette so clearly? He smoked through a couple more, but he couldn't wrap his head around this situation. In fact, he was even starting to get a headache.

"What am I supposed to do...? Maybe I should have read more light novels while I had the chance..."

Unable to collect his thoughts, Akira was getting agitated. The loud footsteps he had been hearing for a while had been putting him on edge to begin with. The footsteps were coming from the deep end of the forest.

(Hold on... There has to be someone making those footsteps.)

The rushed footsteps, as if they were fleeing from something, continued to approach Akira until the culprit finally emerged.

(A kid...? A filthy one, at that.)

He almost spoke to the child, before wondering if the child would understand Japanese. Perhaps from tripping and falling somewhere along the way, the child's face and clothes were covered in dirt. So much so, that Akira couldn't even make out if the child was a boy or a girl. The child had blond hair and red eyes. Akira doubted that they could converse in Japanese, but his best shot was to start asking this kid some questions.

(Right. Kunai was always all showboaty and sarcastic.)

For the time being, as he didn't know what was going on, Akira figured it would be best to act like Kunai. Recalling Kunai's character from the depths of his memory, he tried speaking to the child.

"Well, uh, let's see. Can you understand me?"

"Run!"

“Huh?”

Behind the child, there was a monster with wings formed of bare bones. In a dingy grey, the creature resembled a typical Gargoyle from fantasy worlds. The sinister silhouette dazed Akira, and he couldn't help but laugh, again. Now, it was undeniable that he had found his way into an unreal world.

(Wait... Maybe I'm just crazy.)

There was no way that a creature like this could exist anywhere in Japan, or on Earth, for that matter. 'You're not real!' Akira wanted to shout.

“How to put this... Is that not-so-adorable monster your pet? You should really train it better, you know.”

“Run! Quick! It's a devil!”

Akira groaned internally.

(Devil... A devil, huh?)

He had no clue if he should laugh, run, or maybe beg for his life. What sick joke was he a part of?

“...Puny human, offer your flesh to me.”

“Yikes!”

Akira jumped, dropping his cigarette. The sight of this monster with beet-red eyes coming at him like how a predator would approach prey was a horror-show, to say the least. Terrifying, actually. All Akira wanted to do was run away screaming.

As he lunged to run for his life, the monster swung its large arm, slamming its talons into Akira's face with powerful force. A dull pain throbbed in Akira's forehead, and his eyesight flashed red and white.

“Agh...!”

In the midst of confusion and pain, he could feel flaming rage roar out of his gut.

“...What do you think you're doing?”

A low growl came out of his mouth in a completely different tone than his

usual voice. The moment he spotted the confused monster, his right hand reached inside his coat with blinding speed.

—Automatic Retaliation!

(Woah, I can't control my body...!)

In disregard of Akira's intentions, his body moved on its own. In a flawless motion, as fast as lightning, a knife was thrown!

Retaliation Initiated!

"Revenge" — Success! Increased Retaliation Damage!

"One-Shot Kill" — Success! Critical Rate increased by 30%!

Critical Hit!

Lethal Damage — Greole, King of Devils was destroyed!

—Skill Level over 5000!

"Break Through" "Expert Chain Attacks" — Fail! The target is already defeated!

—Combat Skills activated!

"Overlord" — Fail! The target is already defeated!

"Mind's Eye" — Fail! The target is already defeated!

—Survival Skills activated!

"Meditate" — Success! Kunai regained some health.

The 'Combat Results' flooded Akira's brain, making him dizzy.

(This is just like the game!)

He looked up, and the monster was blown to bits, perhaps from the impact of the knife. Akira couldn't help but wonder who the real monster was. Neither Akira nor the child spoke another word, as painful silence fell on the forest.

Gulping down a lump of saliva, Akira timidly spoke.

"A-Ah, um, well... It's... self-defense. That's what that was. That was not my fault."

The child's gaze felt like daggers to Akira. Those innocent eyes were filled with evident terror and fear. The polar opposite of how a child would look at a hero.

"M-Master Demon Lord... Please don't eat me! I-I won't taste good at all!"

"What the hell!? What kind of monster do you think I am!?"

And so, a Demon Lord fell into a strange world full of the unknown. At this point, no one knew how he, an ordinary man from Japan trapped inside a Demon Lord's body, would survive this cruel fantasy world...

Hakuto Kunai

Race: Human — Age: 45

Weapon Sodom's Fire

A knife that can be used as a close-combat or projectile weapon. Infinite uses.
Bonus Effect: Chance to Burn the target.

Armor Assault Queller

Negates any attack from those under Level 30. Infinite Durability. Has no effect on magic, which didn't exist in the game.

Item The Laws of the Empire (Book)

An item given to those who defeat Kunai. It actually has no effect in the game. Rather, this item would have an effect in the real world.

Item Mild Heaven

The best-selling cigarettes in the Empire. There are many other brands on the market, like Hi-Nite or Spellcaster.

Level: 1 — HP: 40000/40000 — Stamina: 600/600 — Attack: 70 (+50) — Defense: 80 (+20) Dexterity: 60 — Magic: 0 — Magic Defense: 0

Equipped Skills: First: **Charge** Second: **Eye Gouge** Third: **Supersonic**

Combat Skills: **Mad Rush, Break Through, Fake Out, Intimidate, Lock-On, One-Shot Kill, Instinct, Ruler, Avenger, Strategist, Mind's Eye, Overlord, Obliterate, Equal to None, Limit Breaker, Second to None**

Survival Skills: **Recover, Fighting Spirit, Duality, One Step Ahead, Meditate, Medicine**

Duel Skills: **Tyrant, etc.**

Special Abilities: **Administrator, etc.**

Akira Ono, a Japanese man, merely borrowing the appearance and abilities of

the game's final boss. While still categorized as a civilian, he has serious potential when he can commit to it. Acquired through years of running the game and surviving the Japanese workforce, he can fake it until he makes it through any situation. The final boss of the game is no joke, and his stats, especially his HP, are astronomical. He may appear invincible at first glance, but his lack of any protection against magic (which didn't exist in the game) makes him precariously unbalanced. Deep down, his original mind still lurks. Insurmountably cold and cruel, he rules atop 4,143,792 corpses. A bona-fide Demon Lord.

Greole, King of Devils

Race: Top-tier Devil

Level: 34 — HP: 45/666 — Stamina: 200/200 — Attack: 66 — Defense: 66 —
Dexterity: 66 — Magic: 66 — Magic Defense: 66

Spells: **Death Winds, Inferno, Dark Hyper Beam, etc.**

Skills: **Enslave High Devils Control and Boost, etc.**

A great devil sealed away by the Wise Angel, long ago. It can even enslave High Devils, truly making Greole the king among them. Its HP had been drastically reduced from being sealed away, but who could possibly damage the King of Devils through its impervious Defense? If given the chance to devour souls upon souls and flesh upon flesh to regain its power, Greole would have surely brought hell upon earth.

Demon Lord and Evil

The forest that hadn't seen many human souls in ages, was inhabited by not one, but two humans this day. One was a sketchy-looking man with long hair, and the other was a child.

"M-My name... is Kunai. I'm not scary, you know. Nothing to do with the Demon Lord, much less. I just have a few questions for you. Is that all right?"

Akira... Well, the Demon Lord, said, as he pushed his long locks behind his head.

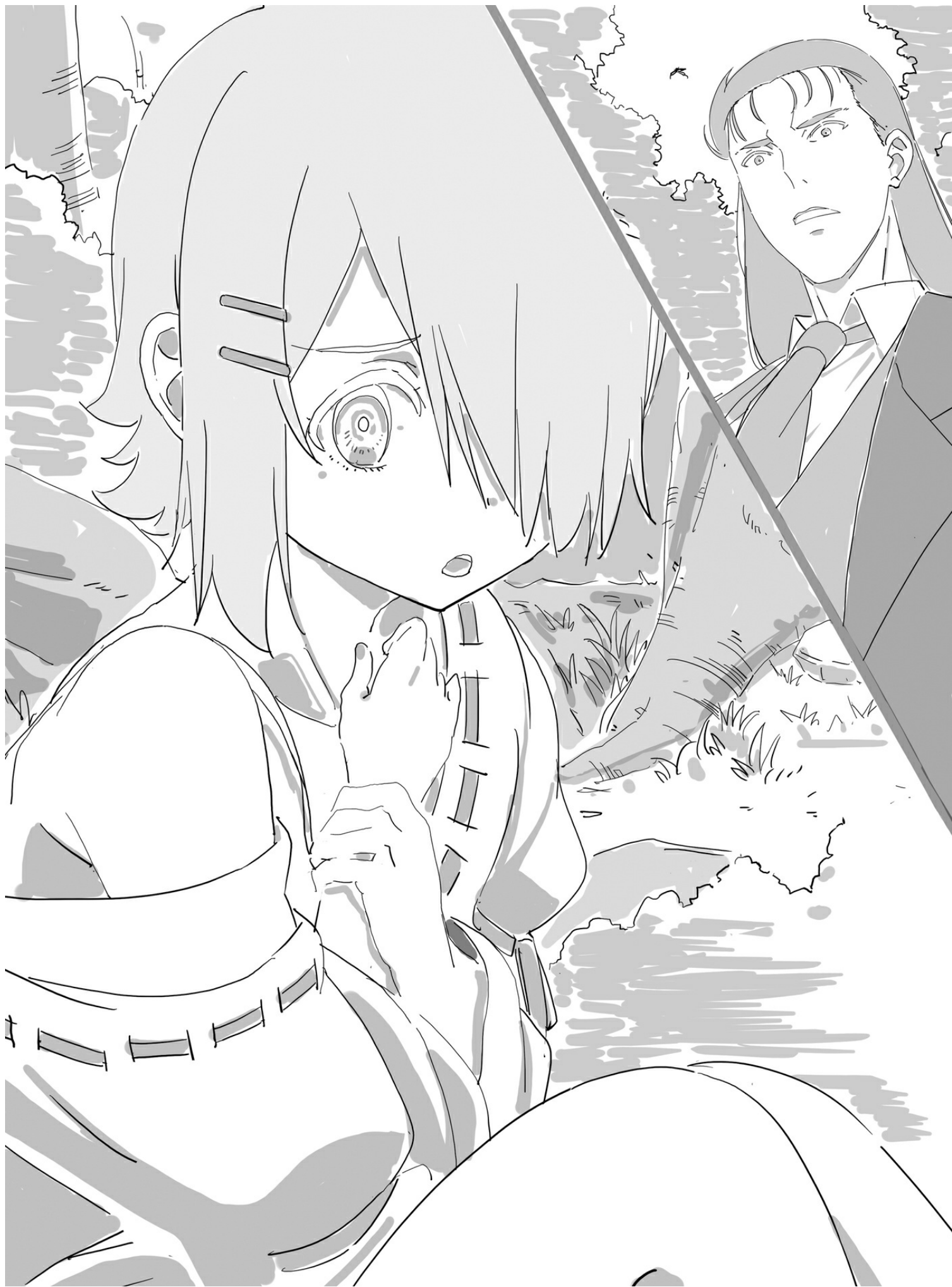
The Demon Lord contemplated for a while what to introduce himself as, and settled on Kunai. He tried to maintain a mature tone in front of the child, but the paint was already cracking, showing his true colors.

"Y-Yes, sir..."

The Demon Lord maintained the best smile he could as to not spook the child, but the little one in front of him held his eyes wide open, quaking with fear. But who could blame the child? A top-tier devil was blown to bits a foot away from them. With the understanding of where that monster stood in terms of power level, anyone would react the same way. Someone who could swat and kill a top-tier devil as if it was a buzzing gnat could be none other than the Demon Lord himself.

"I suppose I should ask you for your name, first. If you don't mind, of course."

"I-I'm Aku."



This response triggered the Demon Lord to do a spit-take before coughing into a tizzy. The Demon Lord and Aku, the Japanese word for ‘evil’... Was this some sort of sign?

“W-What a wonderful name. Have you heard of the country of Japan? Or, like, New York?”

“N-No, I’m sorry... I have never heard of them...”

After mumbling ‘thought so,’ the Demon Lord lit a cigarette. From the looks of it, there was no way that Aku’s clothes were made from modern technology. It seemed to be made of cheap fabric, with a small blue design or two. Fashionable would not have been how the Demon Lord would describe it. The child’s hair was cut-short, except for their bangs, which hid the left half of the child’s face.

The Demon Lord almost directly asked the child if they were a boy or a girl, before being an adult and thinking better of it. Since the child seemed harmless, the Demon Lord decided to ask some of the countless questions he had. ‘What is this world called?’ ‘What is this forest?’ ‘What was that Demon earlier?’ Aku’s answers were all mumbled, and didn’t provide any real insight. It looked like Aku didn’t really have much knowledge, per se. While Aku seemed to understand how one was expected to act in this world, the child didn’t seem to have any existential knowledge on this world. Aku seemed like Average Villager #1, and had the looks to match. There wasn’t much for intellectual discourse between an average villager and an average working Joe.

“I still have some questions for you, but... There’s a lake over there. Why don’t you clean up a bit first?”

“M-May I!?”

“Hm...? I-I don’t see any problem to it. Take the time to dry off, too.”

“Th-Thank you!”

† † †

(Ugh... What to do...?)

Watching Aku trot away to the lake, the Demon Lord let out a sigh. Who he

had hoped to be a precious source of information was an ordinary villager, which left him with too few questions answered. The only new pieces of information he gained were about the country he was in and Aku's village.

(Holylight, was it? Sure doesn't sound like a country on Earth...) Apparently, the nation worshipped the Wise Angel, who, according to legend, had sealed away that devil from earlier. On top of that, the Demon Lord was bombarded with all sorts of laughable stories about things and sayings from groups like the three Holy Maidens who serve the Wise Angel, the Holy Knights' Order, and the Holy Church.

There was no denying the fantasy in this world. It's not like Akira was a high-schooler with infinite possibilities ahead of him. What was the point of summoning an almost middle-aged grown man? Then, a scary thought crossed his mind. What if he wasn't the one who was summoned, after all?

(What if this body was the one that was summoned...?)

After the rapid-fire series of unthinkable events this man has gone through, who could blame the Demon Lord for detaching himself a little bit from the rules of the real world? One of the ex-players of the game, Virgil the Kentucky Fried Butcher had always jeered 'Everyone and their mother is getting sent off to different worlds.' A character in a game, a giant statue of Buddha, a samurai lord... Anything could be summoned across worlds, nowadays. With this kind of mentality, it made sense to the Demon Lord that his vessel was the one that was summoned.

The Demon Lord had no idea what purpose there could be behind the summoning, but if whoever it was was actually after Hakuto Kunai, he figured that there could be a million uses for him. By coincidence, he had been logged in as the character...

(Which means I was roped into this for no reason!)

This conclusion boiled his blood. All because of this stupid final boss, he was thrown into a world he knew nothing about. The Demon Lord wanted to convince himself of this.

(I have to find a way home... Fast.)

Fortunately, for once, Akira Ono had already lost his parents and was a bachelor, leaving no one behind that would worry about his whereabouts. His work, though, was another story. What would his boss say if he pulled a ‘no-call, no-show’ at his age?

(Now, should I head for some town? Or look for clues in the forest?) He took a good look around, but only eerie silence filled the forest. Under normal conditions, this was not the sort of place he would enjoy sticking around in.

(Jeesh, Aku’s taking a while... It’s been a while, right?)

† † †

(Thank goodness I’m alive...!)

Aku could not be happier to be bathing in so much crystal-clear water, able to wash and launder as long as they liked. Not even the villager elder could afford this luxury. Water was a precious commodity around these parts, and Aku’s village could barely provide enough drinking and cooking water for everyone. Any more water, of course, had a price tag on it, and only a select few could afford to rinse their bodies with it. The only time the villagers, including Aku, could bathe or launder was during the rain. It had to be a rainstorm, too, not just a sprinkle. Since this land had been ruled by a devil in the past, the soil had been dried out, and most of the old wells were poisoned. Obtaining even the bare minimum water supply was a difficult task on its own.

Moreover, Aku was ‘tainted.’ There was no way this child was going to pass up on such an opportunity.

(But really, who is that man...?)

Aku pondered, bathing in the lake up to the neck, naked. He had blown that top-tier devil to bits with a single blow. Could he really be the Demon Lord, told of in legends in the Holy City? Judging by his all-black attire, Aku doubted that he was an angel. Finding him alone in this forest was strange to begin with. The forest held a hallowed shrine, and coming here was taboo.

They had been told that there was a beautiful lake in the forest, but the devil’s presence, on top of its mythological status, prevented anyone from actually paying a visit.

(Could it be... he just wants to clean me up before eating me...?) A shiver ran down the child's spine. Aku felt the urge to run for it, but the child had already washed and hung their clothes on the tree. Flee now, and there may not be a chance to recover those clothes. Considering that there could be more devils around, that was suicide.

"Hey, you done yet? Hurry it up, I want to check out the Aku-stics in there."

"I-I'm sorry! I'll be right out!"

"Nah, I've just been holding on to that one. Take your time cleaning up."

Despite the Demon Lord telling Aku not to rush, the child shuddered at the thought of keeping the Master Demon Lord waiting.

(He might have some reason for keeping me alive now, but one wrong move to upset him and I'm done for.) As the child peered over to see if the Master Demon Lord was upset, Aku saw him mumbling to himself as he moved both of his hands in a flurry. Was he performing some kind of curse ritual?

"Yes! I can use admin features!"

(Adminfi Churrs...? Could it be the name of an ancient false god?) The more Aku thought about it, the name sounded more and more sinister. After watching what ensued, however, the child would become convinced of this theory.

A pitch-black hole opened in the space in front of the Demon Lord, into which he shoved his right hand in without hesitation. Just imagining what could possibly emerge from the void made Aku want to cry. A dark scythe? Some equipment of darkness? Aku even imagined a pair of silverware the Demon Lord would use to eat the child up.

"There we go... Here. Soap and a towel. Use these."

"Huh...? This isn't bubbles, is it!?"

"B-Bubbles? Anyway, I'll take a look around the area, just to be safe."

With that, the Demon Lord walked away from the lake. Even as he went, he mumbled things like 'My Skill Points are plummeting though...' which Aku didn't really understand.

(Wait, I almost forgot about the bubbles!)

This was something Aku had dreamt about using, even just once. But, the child wondered, how could the Demon Lord produce such an item of luxury reserved for nobles?

† † †

“I didn’t expect that to come in so handy...”

The Demon Lord muttered to himself as he opened the admin screen. Earlier, part of his administrator privileges were unlocked for some reason. It looked like he was able to take advantage of them by using SP, a system of the game. In the game, SP increases or decreases from combat, Retaliation, or use of items. Players could spend SP to learn powerful skills, shore up defenses, or even weaken opponents by robbing them of their SP. In this world too, the Demon Lord seemed to acquire SP after combat as expected. He had obtained some after the last encounter.

“But 5 points for that crap item...?”

Craft Novice item ---- 5SP

Craft Intermediate item ---- 10SP

Craft Advanced item ----20SP

Craft Master item ---- 30SP

Craft Super Rare item ---- 50SP

The Demon Lord got carried away from the excitement of unlocking an admin feature, but the items he crafted were just so unimpressive. The bar of soap was a garbage throwing weapon, and even the towel was a piece of body armor, but their modifiers were +1 each. Pathetic. Carrying these around towards the latter half of the Game meant that death was imminent.

“Thirty or so SP left... I wonder if the other categories would unlock if I save up enough? Or are there other conditions to meet?”

Closing his eyes, he contemplated this for a while. While the Demon Lord couldn’t grasp how powerful his previous opponent was, the amount of SP he obtained indicated that the devil was a pretty high-level enemy. On the other

hand, it was so weak. The amount of the reward didn't reflect how easy the creature was to take down. This was what the Demon Lord was bothered about.

"It doesn't look like everything's as it was in the game..."

In the game, the level difference between a player and their enemy would drastically affect the amount of SP the player could earn. In other words, defeating an enemy with a much higher level would earn the player loads of SP, while the inverse would leave the player with a meager amount of SP.

"Oh, I get it... That thing must have been one of those silver slime types."

The Demon Lord imagined a particular monster from one of the most prolific JRPGs out there. Weak, but quick to escape, this monster offered an exorbitant EXP for defeating it. He considered that, if there were more of those creatures around here, he'd better hunt them to extinction. At this time, Aku came to him from the lake.

"M-Master Demon Lord! Thank you for waiting!"

"I've told you, I'm not the Demon... Oh, whatever. Anyway, do a lot of those weaklings pop up around here?"

"N-No way! If there was more of that monster out there, our nation would be doomed!"

"Huh...? That thing was really that dangerous?"

Aku nodded profusely in confirmation. The Demon Lord was becoming less sure of his assessment, but he knew that he wanted to prioritize earning SP above all else in order to unlock as many admin features as he could.

If possible, he wanted to earn plenty of SP before leaving the forest. At this rate, who knows what would happen to them as soon as they left? Moreover, the Demon Lord thought there was a possibility that, if he unlocked all of the admin features with SP, he might discover a way home.

"Aku, do you know his lair, or nest, or something? I want to check it out."

"According to legend, the King of Devils... was sealed away in the Shrine of Wishes in this forest."

"Wishes, huh...? Would you mind showing me the way?"

“I-I’m sorry, I would love to, but my foot isn’t exactly in... tip-top shape.”

Looking down, the Demon Lord noticed a large scar on Aku’s right ankle. A painful one to look at, as it seemed like a large cut or tear had healed over without much medical attention.

(Am I putting too much guesswork into this? It could be an illness unique to this world.) Unfortunately, the Demon Lord was no doctor. One of the Demon Lord’s advisors back in the game had the (perhaps unfair) power to heal any illness or injury, but alas, there was nothing he could do now.

“Fine... I’ll carry you. Get on my back.”

“I-I wouldn’t dare bring my filth upon you!”

“Sorry, but we’re short on time. I won’t ask you again. Just do it.”

“...”

The Demon Lord crouched to the ground, turning his back to Aku, but the child remained motionless. What’s worse, Aku’s expression was filled with pain, tearing up.

(Jeez... Does this kid hate me that much? My skin isn’t that thick!) The young child’s tears flustered the Demon Lord.

“I-I’ve always been unwanted in my village. I always tried to collect the trash or empty people’s waste to help as much as I could...”

“...So waste management, right? That’s an important job.”

“Everyone always said I smelled bad... That I was dirty... So they finally decided that I would be the sacrifice for the devil...”

Aku chuckled, still tearful. The Demon Lord didn’t know much about this village, but this wasn’t right, as far as he could tell. This child was forced to do the dirty work of village, just to end up as a human sacrifice?

“Everyone in the village says... that I taint whoever I touch, so...”

It seemed like little more than grade school bullying to the Demon Lord. He was truly speechless. Grabbing Aku by the neck without a word, he forced the child onto his back.

“W-Wait! If you touch me...!”

“You think you can ‘taint’ someone that easily? Doesn’t matter how dirty you get, just take a bath. Good as new.”

“...!”

“But where is that Shrine...”

The Demon Lord stopped short, as the child’s muffled crying began.

(Woah, the kid’s crying for real! Wait. Don’t I just look like a kidnapper, now!?)



If someone would have walked up to them now, they might infer that the Demon Lord was kidnapping a crying child. This would have surely led to an arrest if there were a police-like entity in this world. Although, being arrested for kidnapping on the first day after being sent to a fantasy world would have made for a unique plot twist.

“Are you okay... Touching me...!?”

The Demon Lord contemplated how to answer this for a moment. From what he had heard so far, he assumed that everyone around Aku had always called the child filthy and tainted. In the modern day, this psychological abuse would have lead the child straight to a life of depression, or, worst case scenario, even suicide.

“Aku, you called me the Demon Lord, didn’t you...? Do you think the Demon Lord is so fragile as to be tainted by someone like you?”

He couldn’t help but blush before his tongue could dry. That came out cornier than he had hoped. If anyone who knew him would have heard, he would not have lived it down for at least a decade.

“No... I don’t think so...!”

Aku relaxed, and seemed to put more weight on the Demon Lord’s back. Of course, the Demon Lord’s ridiculous body could have carried a semi truck with his pinky. A child’s body, to him, was as light as a feather.

“Thank you... Master Demon Lord...”

Aku’s soft body was held close to his back. The Demon Lord could smell the pleasant scent of soap from behind him.

“...Aren’t you holding on a little too tight, there?”

“I-I don’t think so!”

Aku

Race: Human — Age: 13

Item Soap (made in the Empire)

Even though bars of soap in this world are made with primitive methods and ingredients, nobles, aristocrats, and prostitutes pay big money for them, making them scarce in the open market. Soap created by the nation with supremely advanced technology, the Empire, is sublimely crafted down to every bubble. There's really no comparison.

Item Bath Towel (made in the Empire)

The Empire was obsessed with implementing artisanal details to every product imaginable. Even a simple bath towel was embedded with all sorts of technological enhancements. This towel has a softness that begs the question: "Hey, did you get a new fabric softener?" along with unparalleled absorbance.

Armor Plain Clothes

Its Defense stat is nonexistent. However, this was relatively well-made attire in the village, making Aku a little more presentable to the King of Devils. Some of the less fortunate members of the village could only afford hemp clothes.

Level: 1 — HP: 10/10 — Stamina: 20/20 — Attack: 1 — Defense: 1 —
Dexterity: 1 — Magic: 1 — Magic Defense: 1

Aku's hair is only long in the front, enough to cover the entire left half of the face. This wasn't done out of fashion, but because Aku's left eye is green due to heterochromia, a trait that definitely exacerbated the bullying. Aku's parents both died of illness when Aku was young, solidifying the ostracization of the child in the village.

The Shrine of Wishes

A long-haired man was carrying a young child on his back. That description could fit for an ordinary father and child, but this man was not ordinary in the slightest. His hair was black, which was a rare trait in this world, not to mention that it was as long as a woman's. To boot, he was clad entirely in black. Some would only think of a devil or Death upon seeing him.

"The Shrine of Wishes, was it? So, what? Do you throw some money in there and pray or something?"

"I don't know much about it either, but I've been told that the Wise Angel used the strength of the shrine to seal away the King of Devils."

Hearing this, the Demon Lord mumbled 'That's some voodoo.' He was expecting the shrine to be something similar to Shinto shrines, but that didn't seem to be the case. Phrases like 'the Wise Angel' and 'Devils' didn't mean much to him, either.

Akira Ono, the man trapped in the Demon Lord's body, had no particular interest in religion, almost to the point of atheism. If Hakuto Kunai were asked what God meant to him... he would answer 'I am God.' Neither character seemed at all suited for surviving a fantasy world. If an inquisition or the like were to take place, they would be the first to be thrown into the pyre.

"I'm starting to doubt there's anything there worth looking for..."

"O-Of course there is! Legend has it, the shrine grants the wishes of those who visit."

Aku said, tightening their arms around the Demon Lord's neck. The Demon Lord was walking with incredible speed. He assumed the child was holding on tighter to keep from falling off, but there seemed to be another reason.

"I-I've never, um, been so close to someone."

Aku said, burrowing into the Demon Lord's back. Upon hearing this, the Demon Lord raised a brow.

(I still have no clue if this kid is a boy or a girl...)

“I-If you go to the shrine, Master Demon Lord, I think it will grant you powers to conquer the world or something!”

“Nope! No, thank you!”

His façade of maturity was beginning to crumble with every line of conversation with Aku, but now, they had finally arrived at their destination. In an even more remote corner of the forest that was already sparse of humans, in a large, rocky hill, there was a gaping cave.

(Dude, this smell...)

Noticing the stench as he approached the cave, the Demon Lord scrunched his nose.

“Aku, wait here. It might be dangerous in there.”

“Y-Yes, sir!”

The source of the stench soon became apparent. A pile of human corpses were strewn about in the cave. Some looked torn apart with giant claws, some were torn to bits, and others were burnt to a crisp. Combined with copious amounts of blood drained from them and the feces spilling out of their guts, the stench was stinging.

(What is this, a black magic ritual?)

The Demon Lord jeered, but he was also surprised at how calm he was in the midst of so many bodies and such a stench. The normal reaction would have been to panic, surely. In contrast, the Demon Lord remained unmoved facing the tragedy in front of him. In fact, he even felt a sense of familiarity, somehow.

(Where have I seen... a sickening sight like this before?)

His attempt for recollection was met with a heavy fog on his mind. There was no reason he should have come across such a sight during his ordinary life. He brushed it off.

(Maybe I saw something online.)

Nowadays, a quick search online can pull up endless imagery of dead bodies. One could even browse painful scars of war with the press of a button.

(Whatever. The bigger problem here is that thing over there...) A stone statue stood among the corpses as if to gaze down upon them, carrying a vile air around it. The Demon Lord would not have been surprised if this statue had moved on its own to kill these people. The name 'Shrine of Wishes' was so far off from this sight.

When the Demon Lord took another step forward, the eyes of the statue glowed red. Instinctively, the Demon Lord reached for a knife, but the statue remained motionless. In fact, it seemed to be observing the cave's latest intruder. Impossibly, the statue opened its mouth, and murmured: "I see... You really are the Demon Lord."

"...Huh?"

"I have granted many a wish, but I fear this will be my last."

"H-Hold on a minute... How much do you know? I'm getting a feeling that you're the one who summoned me here."

The statue remained silent for a while before speaking again. Its response was incredibly significant for the Demon Lord, but it didn't seem to carry the same weight for the statue.

"Not I... These humans, here. 'Summon the Demon Lord,' they said."

"These guys...? Did they summon that monster out there, too?"

"That one resurrected itself with ease... Because of that creature, my powers are nearly depleted."

"Depleted... Then, send me back to my world before it's all gone."

The statue's answer was simple.

"I can't."

The Demon Lord clawed at his head at the terribly conclusive tone.

"Why not? You want money? An offering or something? Don't tell me to offer you human flesh like these guys here."

"Those were killed by Greole, King of Devils. I can not grant a wish that contradicts a wish."

The summoning of the Demon Lord was wished and granted... The statue seemed to refuse any wish that would negate another, like sending Akira back to his own world. In a way, it was honorable.

“Still, I expect you to be my last visitor... I grant you this.”

A menacing ring materialized out of the statue, and flew onto the Demon Lord’s finger. A perfect fit. Seeing the heinous design, he tried desperately to yank it off, but to no avail.

“What the hell!? Walking around with this thing on my finger would be torture!”

“I hope that your wish... May be granted...”

“You stupid, false god... Hold on a second!”

“Even I was pure in the beginning... Ages of evil wishes changed what I am.”

Those were the last words of the statue before it crumbled. Turning into sand, it spilled off of its pedestal. The Demon Lord couldn’t do anything but watch. He sighed.

“What am I supposed to do with this ring?”

Looking at the ring on his right middle finger, the Demon Lord sulked. It seemed impossible to take off, no matter how much his powers grew, and no matter what tricks he tried. Everything about it seemed like a cursed item, right down to its design.

“Administrator... Analyze Item.”

The analysis would make the Demon Lord sulk even further. If it was an item with a curse on it, he was planning to take it off with a curse-breaker.

“How is this treated like a normal item...? And it took SP to analyze, too...”

The woes of the Demon Lord continued. This was turning into the Shrine of Sighs.

Once he exited the cave, Aku asked ‘How was it?’ with a smile on their face, but the Demon Lord remained stern-faced.

“Did you wish to conquer the world? Ooh, or maybe for a paradise of women

and liquor?”

Hearing this, the Demon Lord wrapped his arm around Aku’s neck in a headlock. Then, he started throwing some light punches at the child’s head, mimicking a certain character from a certain fighting game.

“Yoga! Yoga!”

“Ow! Ow! Please stop, Master Demon Lord!”

† † †

(What to do... Maybe I should find a town or something and gather more information?) Flipping his long hair back, the Demon Lord contemplated. There was just too much that he didn’t know and didn’t understand. Unless he remedied his lack of knowledge about this world, the Demon Lord feared, he might fall into some pitfalls that would be otherwise avoidable. It was time to leave the remote forest.

(Especially since I couldn’t find anything off of those bodies...) Just remembering that bit made him queasy. The game was filled with bodies, but naturally, seeing them for real was a completely different experience. The Demon Lord figured that, if that King of Devils was the culprit, it was for the best that he eliminated the creature. If left alive, that monster might have left mountains of corpses in his wake just by existing.

“Aku, are there any big cities around here?”

“Yes... But could we stop by my village first? It’s not much, but I do have some things there.”

“Hm? You want to come with me?”

“C-Could I...? Um, since I was made a sacrifice, I can’t really... go back and live there... Um...”

The Demon Lord nearly banged his head at Aku’s plea, but it didn’t seem like such a bad idea on second thought. He knew nothing about this world, after all. Having a resident of it by his side could come in handy. Besides, from what he could discern so far, sending Aku back home would only cause the child harm. Traveling together would be a win-win.

“Sure. Let’s stop by your village first. Is it close?”

“Oh, thank you! You would get there in no time, Master Demon Lord!”

Once again, the Demon Lord carried the child on his back.

The Demon Lord was mumbling things like ‘What am I, a kangaroo?’ but Aku wore a smile, and seemed rather happy.

(While we’re at it, I should get some questions out of the way...) Along the way, the Demon Lord tried asking all sorts of questions. They both spoke Japanese, and he confirmed that Aku could read the Japanese text, numbers, and alphabet letters on his notebook. He couldn’t tell if there was some sort of translation filter, or if the inhabitants of this world spoke Japanese to begin with.

“Well, if we can communicate, that’s fine with me. I’m too old to start learning a second language. Let alone a language of another world.”

“...? Your writing was so neat, sir, it was easy to read.”

True, the writing in the notebook was meticulous. In accordance with his backstory as a high-ranking government official, Kunai’s writing resembled that of a master calligrapher.

“But human sacrifice, huh...? That’s pretty medieval. Is that a common practice around these parts?”

“The King of Devils was resurrected a few years ago, and started wreaking havoc all around the area... They decided that each village would take turns offering a human sacrifice.”

“I don’t get it... You said these villages were part of a nation, right? Wouldn’t the national government do something about it? I bet they could have hunted it down.”

“We’re very far from the Holy City...”

In other words, these villages seemed to be in the countryside, far enough away where people in the big city didn’t care much about them. The Demon Lord recalled news stories from Japan that took place in remote islands or villages in the secluded countryside that were dying off from lack of offspring.

“Um, where did you... come from, Master Demon Lord?”

For a moment, he wasn't sure how to answer this. 'Japan' surely wouldn't suffice, and 'the Empire' would make even less sense. The Empire only existed in the world of a video game created by Akira Ono, and wasn't real, after all.

“W-Well... Let's just say I've come a long way.”

The Demon Lord deflected the question and quickened his step.

He was sure that no one would believe him if he told the truth. Best case scenario, they would call him a madman.

“Oh, Master Demon Lord. There's my village. Over that fence.”

“That one, huh...?”

The Demon Lord was a little nervous of the fact that he was getting used to being addressed as such, but what he saw beyond the fence was even more nerve-wracking. Not quite a ghost town, but more of a decrepit village that would be well-suited as the setting for a horror story.

The Demon Lord's Ring

Even though it was still light out, there was no hustle nor bustle in this village. The Demon Lord thought it resembled a closed-off village deep within a mountain range in Japan.

“I'm expecting them to tell me that they can't trust outsiders or something.”

“W-Well... Most people in my village don't like visitors.”

(Really...? I was just judging by the cover.)

The Demon Lord was hoping that the villagers might even spare him some food or change, but that seemed out of the picture now.

“My house is this way. It may be unpleasant, but please forgive me... I won't take long.”

Aku climbed off of the Demon Lord's back, and started walking with a limp in their right leg. Watching the child limp away, the Demon Lord began to feel

sorry. Perhaps Aku never had access to proper medical care.

As he followed Aku, he observed the village, still on guard. Not that he expected any different, but he couldn't find any traces of modern technology.

(Housing built of bare wood and compacted mud... Some straw roofs, even.) No sight of air conditioning units or satellite dishes, which were, of course, ubiquitous in Japan. This was just another confirmation of how distant this world was from the one he was familiar with. As he looked around every corner, he began to notice some villagers in the distance, here and there. The instant the Demon Lord spotted a villager looking at him, he reflexively hid. In the game, no good ever came from being spotted by other characters. It was kind of an occupational hazard, at this point.

“Change Fighting Stance... Stealth Stance.”

With this command, the Demon Lord's appearance blurred, as if to melt into the background. In the game, this stance would dramatically reduce the chance of being spotted by enemies. In exchange, the stance also reduced the character's Attack and Defense stats considerably.

Seeing that he was concealed, the Demon Lord sighed in relief. He was a little nervous inside, but judging by the reaction of the people around him, it seemed like no one could see him anymore. It was getting scary how similar everything was to the game. The Demon Lord wondered if this world... manifested every aspect of the game. He decided that he should put this theory to the test.

“Oh... Master Demon Lord?”

Aku's reaction further confirmed his invisibility. Seizing this perfect opportunity, the Demon Lord moved on to his next experiment, using something he didn't really get the chance to in-game... The Communication system. This feature was designed for players to send each other messages, but had not been seeing much use recently. Naturally, smartphones had not been invented when the game was launched, and this mode of communication was much appreciated. In the past few years, however, it had completely become a relic of the past.

Communication: Aku. ...Can you hear me?

...Wha? I can hear Master Demon Lord's horrifying voice in my head!

That's a little harsh. Don't worry about me. I'm still following you closely.

Y-Yes, sir!

After making sure that the Communication system was working, the Demon Lord cracked a grin. He nodded in appreciation of the importance of exploration. If he had stayed in the forest alone, he would not have discovered any of this.

(My nerves are thicker than I thought, though... I would have guessed that I would be in a panic attack by now.) A peculiar thought, that maybe even his mind was being taken over by Kunai, entered the Demon Lord's head.

(Don't. Don't... What kind of psycho-horror plotline is that?)

Although it was his own imagination who suggested it, the Demon Lord was chilled to the bone at this notion.

"What are you doing here, you piece of garbage!?"

Turning to where the insult came from, the Demon Lord spotted a few villagers pointing and shouting at Aku. There was no doubt about it, those were Aku's bullies. On second thought, perhaps everyone in the village was.

"Don't tell me you ran away... you piece of garbage!"

"What are you thinking!? What if that devil attacks the village!?"

"You don't get the concept of sacrifice, do you!?"

The Demon Lord couldn't help but face-palm at these accusations. Did they hear themselves shouting at a young child like this? That being said, there were some reservations for the Demon Lord, who knew nothing about the culture (or whatever) of this world, to interject. As far as he knew, it might have been commonplace in this world to offer human sacrifices to devils. Even on modern-day Earth, plenty of customs and traditions of one country may seem outlandish to people outside of it.

(Still, though...)

Still, it didn't feel right for him to watch grown adults bear down on a child

like that. When he was considering the option of carrying Aku away while still in the Stealth stance, a blood-chilling voice echoed inside of him.

If you don't like them... Purge them.

His spine froze at the voice, and the chilling air it brought with it. The Demon Lord immediately knew who was speaking to him. To make things worse, an unbearable pain emanated from his right middle finger. Claspings his hands, the Demon Lord curled onto the ground. The pain was too great for him to keep standing.

Exterminate those who are unworthy... It is my right.

The Demon Lord yelled back, internally.

(Shut the hell up...! That's only in the game!)

'Purge' or 'exterminate' real-life people? That was unthinkable to the Demon Lord.

How strange. That very right, that Game, that system, that nation of madness, all of it... was created by you.

The Demon Lord was speechless.

You... are the root of evil. If I am the monster who purged four million, then you, who will bring upon doom to all of this world...

Squeezing the ring hard enough to break it, the Demon Lord hushed the voice out. It was just a hallucination, the Demon Lord concluded, and tightly shut his eyes while telling himself that he was just tired. That's all it was. So many things had happened, one after another.

Aku, ignore those men. Just bring your things.

The Demon Lord called out to Aku, but there was no response. He opened his eyes to see Aku on their back on the ground. Waving their hands to and fro, the villagers seemed to be throwing more disgusting insults at the child. The Demon Lord had seen enough, and deactivated his Stealth stance. At that moment, the villagers were sent into a frenzy. No one could really blame them since the Demon Lord suddenly appeared out of nowhere, but their panicked state was quite comical to watch.

“Aku, go get your things. Hurry.”

“Y-Yes... sir.”

Watching Aku limp away, the Demon Lord leisurely lit his cigarette. All the while, more and more villagers were clamoring about him. Under different circumstances, he would have asked some questions, but the Demon Lord didn't feel like conversing with the likes of them.

“Ar-Are you a devil...? A minion of the King...?”

“Please don't attack the village! We offered a sacrifice!”

“It's not fair! Even devils must abide by their contract!”

Exhaling smoke, the Demon Lord contemplated what the villagers had said. Contract? Interesting. He sincerely doubted that any devil planned to keep their word, though. His better guess was that the devil offered contracts to lock these people down.

“Th-Thank you for waiting, Master Demon Lord!”

“D-Demon Lord!?”

“D-D-D-D-Demon Lord!”

(Great. Add fuel to the fire, kid...!)

Hearing this, the village frenzy only grew. Of course, the Demon Lord had no intention of clearing his name to them. These were people that called a young child a ‘piece of garbage,’ sent them off to be sacrificed, and bullied the poor child all the way. The Demon Lord contemplated if they were even worth the effort. The answer was a hard no.

“I-I'll contact the lord!”

The man, who must have been the one that tripped Aku to the ground, ran away. On his face, he wore a disgusting grin. A thought seemed to cross his mind, as he stopped by his house and emerged with some kind of bag. In preparation for an expected reward, it seemed like. The Demon Lord couldn't help but frown. As if in reaction to his emotions, the ring emanated a dangerous glow. This time, the Demon Lord didn't think he could stop it. His right hand reached inside his coat and threw a knife at the man's house without much

care. The knife accurately struck the wall of the house and erupted black flames. The wooden house was immediately engulfed in fire... and then in black smoke.

“M-My house... Not my house!”

“...Ha ha ha ha! Watching fire burn never gets old. It soothes the soul!”

The Demon Lord was astounded by the words that came out of his mouth. Hurriedly, he threw Aku on his back and fled the scene. Allowing the ring to take control, he felt, might lead to a disaster.

(Now I just look like an arsonist!)

Dripping with cold sweat, the Demon Lord ran as fast as he could. He flew through various scenes, as if he were fast-forwarding through them.

“M-Master Demon Lord... Wh-What have you done!?”

“J-Just for the record, that was to keep them warm. An act of kindness, even. Yes. That’s what that was!”

His feet were moving too fast to stop now. And so was his mouth, spewing out perpetual nonsense.

“B-But... It felt... Good. Just a little bit!”

Aku said, and smiled. This might have been the first smile the Demon Lord had seen on the child.

“Of-Of course! Kindness touches the heart!”

This line was so ridiculous that even the Demon Lord himself could not keep a straight face. Now both of them were laughing their faces off. The sun had sunk, and the curtain of night was about to descend upon them. With his tireless body, the Demon Lord felt like he never had to stop running.

“Master Demon Lord, how far are we going!?”

Aku shouted through the gusts of wind that felt like they were blowing through them. Up until this point, a shadow had been looming on the child’s face, on and off. Now, Aku brimmed with an age-appropriate glow. The Demon Lord couldn’t help but forget his age and shout back.

“To the city... To the Holy City!”

And so, Master Demon Lord (with a little arson now on his track record), began his journey with cheerful Aku at his side. The pair would go on to cause a number of incidents that would send the nation of Holylight into utter chaos... But the story hasn't gotten to that part quite yet.

You Unlocked Some Information!!

Stats

When looking at stats like Attack and Defense, 1 indicates the stats of an average human, at any age. 2 would mean that those stats are double that of an average human. 3 is triple, and 4 or 5? Well... the closest comparison in real-life would be a world-class athlete or an Olympian. There is a huge difference between 1 and 2 in this world, and raising one's stats by 1 is a monumental task. Perhaps talent is a prerequisite to achieving that task.

Stamina

Expendable through various activities, including magic. The bottom line is that, until a person runs out of Stamina, they can use their full strength. A super-elite warrior's Stamina would exceed 50. That translates to over 2 hours of full-force combat. Kunai's Stamina is 600. Due to his role in the Game, he was designed to have more than enough Stamina to exert his full strength 24/7. A truly untamable monster... the Demon Lord.

Chapter Two: The Holy Maiden in Gold

Holylight

A lord's manor in a remote part of Holylight...

Lord Billitzo Lang, who ruled over a few of the remote villages in the area, looked delighted at his first good news in a while. Surprisingly, the resurrected 'King of Devils' was dead. It had been nearly hopeless to tax those villages before a monster like that started wreaking havoc.

(Luck is coming my way...)

Soon after, he received the news that the Demon Lord had been spotted. Billitzo was now fully convinced that the Goddess of Luck was smiling upon him. No matter how many times he urgently sent a horse to the Holy City with the message pertaining to the King of Devils' resurrection, there had been no response. However, the news of the Demon Lord's appearance, Billitzo figured, could not go ignored.

(I best cry as loud as I can to get the Holy City involved.) Billitzo himself did not believe in the existence of the Demon Lord or the like. He only thought that his foolish subjects were causing a ruckus. What he feared was that he would spend the rest of his life in this remote part of the country. With some kind of commotion, he had the chance to escape (what he called) a claustrophobic, isolated cesspool.

('Burned down a village' has a better ring to it...)

According to the report, only a single house had burned down. Billitzo had scoffed at it. From that report alone, he saw enough evidence to doubt the Demon Lord's existence. He figured that, most likely, a starving ex-mercenary or the like resorted to arson.

(But... How did the King of Devils die?)

Legend has it that the King of Devils was sealed away by the Wise Angel, long

ago. For the most part, it wasn't an entity that humans could do anything about. It was more akin to a natural disaster, like an earthquake or hurricane.

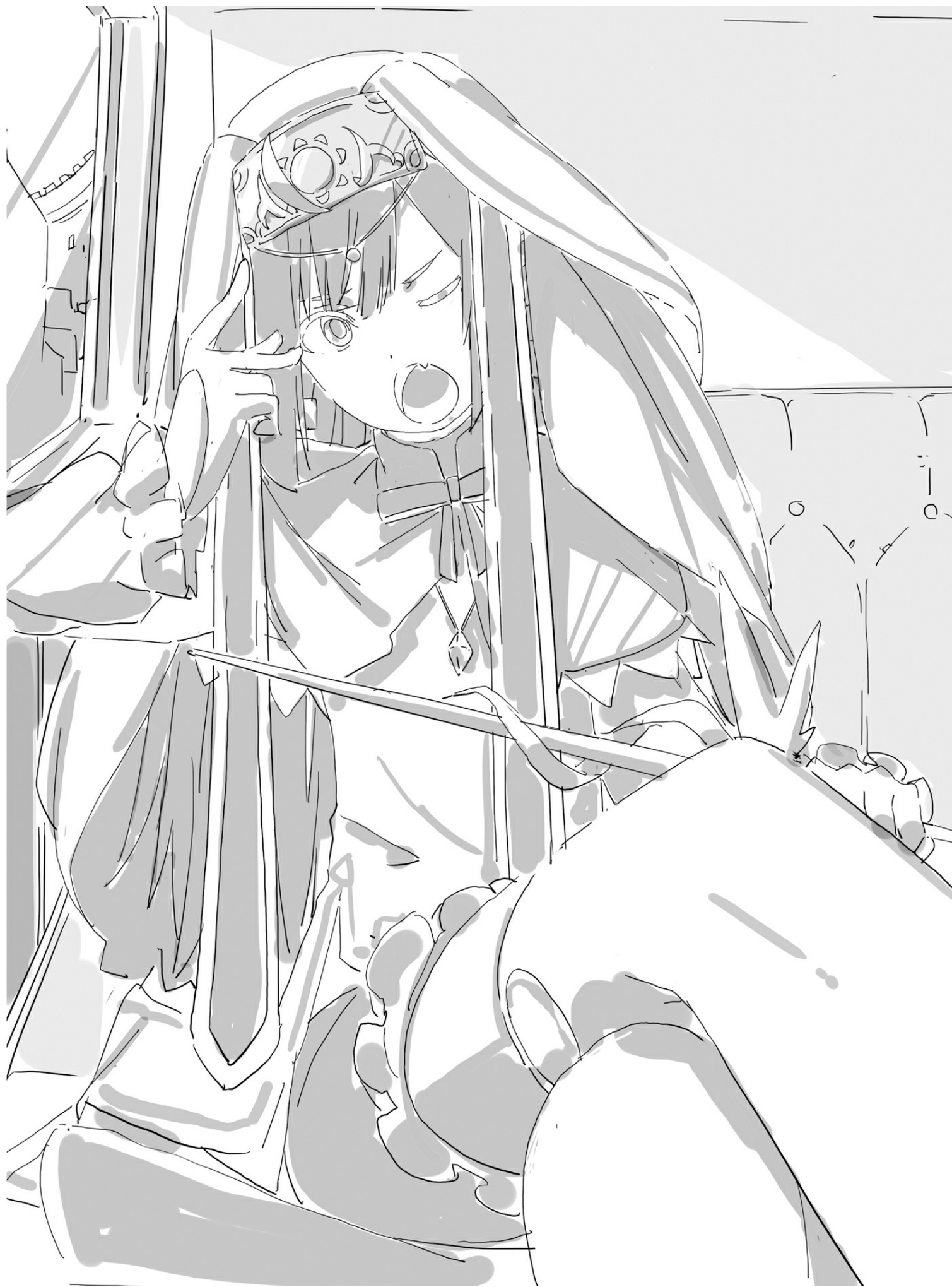
(It wasn't a complete resurrection, I suppose. How often have legends been accurate, anyways?) Billitzo was born a noble, and never once had to struggle in his life. If a storm had passed already, he didn't think to go look for the reason. He would only use that fact as his ticket out of his oh-so-terrible situation.

(I know. I'll say that the Demon Lord defeated the King of Devils!) 'Brilliant,' Billitzo muttered to himself. A neat solution to his problem, he thought. What he didn't know was that his improvised lie was actually the unbelievable truth.

--Somewhere in Holylight

A girl in a nun's robe was screeching in a manner unbecoming of her modest appearance. She was aboard an extravagant carriage on her way to a remote part of the country, but the ride seemed too rough for her taste.

"It's disappointing, isn't it!? How pathetic your devotion to me is!?"



The coachman shriveled his neck into his shoulders in response. A noble among all nobles was aboard the carriage... one of the Holy Maidens. One wrong move and he could be burned at the stake. This Holy Maiden, the youngest, was particularly bratty. No one knew how to handle her, exactly. Her appearance, however, was worthy of her title. Her wavy, pink hair was as graceful as cherry blossoms — even her eyes were blush pink. Despite wearing the clothes of a nun, her limbs were slender and attractive. Partially due to her young age, her breasts were still lacking.

“I am about to defeat the legendary Demon Lord! What if my butt gets bruised before I even get there!?”

“I-I’m terribly sorry... The roads out here aren’t paved, and...”

“...Are you criticizing the policies of the Sanctimonium?”

“N-Never!”

Around these parts, there weren’t roads, per se. In the Holy City, the roads were paved with stone, and sometimes maintained with magic, but roads in the poorer regions were left untouched. Even a little bit of rain would become a flood.

“Ar-Are the other Holy Maidens not joining you today?”

“What are you trying to say...? You don’t think I can handle it on my own?”

“Oh, Lady Luna! There’s no doubt in my mind that you won’t need anybody else!”

“Pff. Duh. I can’t let my sisters steal my thunder forever!”

Luna Elegant, aged 16. Her name was just about the only elegant thing about her. Twenty five guards surrounded her carriage, but Luna was not counting on their help. She fully intended to finish the job on her own and claim all the glory for herself.

True, she did have an impressive gift in magic that was sure to be a powerful weapon in her fight against the Demon Lord...

--Holylight, en route to the Holy City

Sometime before that storm started brewing around them, the Demon Lord and the child were causing a commotion on a road without another soul or any lights to be seen. At first glance, they might look like a father and his child, but something was off. The Demon Lord's cheeks were rosy, and he was on the tipsy side. When a carriage had passed them on the path earlier, a generous passenger had gifted them a few bottles of liquor.

"Emerge, a fragment of my brilliance... 'Survival Pack'."

The Demon Lord shoved his hand into a pitch-black void and produced a large object: an item made by the Empire. As its name might suggest, it was packed with all sorts of camping tools. This was one of the essential items used in the Game.

"Wow, Master Demon Lord! Is there anything else in there!?"

With cheeks as rosy as the Demon Lord's, the child shouted in excitement. The child wasn't drinking, but seemed buzzed by proxy. There were practically no age restrictions for drinking alcohol in this world, and it wasn't uncommon for children to drink, but he forbade it. This Demon Lord seemed rather pedestrian, sometimes.

It's worth noting that liquor came by cheaper than water in this part of the country.

"There is no end to my darkness... 'Defense Pack'."

The Demon Lord didn't seem too hesitant about playing his part, now. Striking a weird pose, he took out another item, also made by the Empire. This one was packed with various tools used to defend against other players. Another must-have for participants of the Game. These items were useless on their own, but unleashed their true potential when they were combined.

"Combine Items... 'Construct Fortress'."

At the Demon Lord's command, two items merged together to create a 'Base' in the blink of an eye. This was a very useful item in the Game, as it greatly reduced the damage inflicted by other players, and allowed the user to recover safely. A player could also combine more items with the base to add all kinds of features to it.

“Is this magic!? Master Demon Lord, I can’t believe it!”

Aku, sprung onto the Demon Lord in pure joy. Pleased by this reaction, the Demon Lord let out a hearty laugh.

“This isn’t magic, no. Aku, let me tell you something important.”

The Demon Lord said, and took a deep breath. As if this was an all-important lesson in life, he pointed his finger at Aku.

“Remember this... With the powers of the Empire, nothing is impossible!”

Brushing his hair back, the Demon Lord thrust his fist into the sky. He looked supremely lame. ...Or just plain drunk. Aku had no idea what he was talking about, but responded with cheerful applause.

“It’s so... Big. And rock hard...!”

Aku said some accidentally suggestive things, but the drunken Demon Lord didn’t take notice. In fact, he continued to brag on in an even more elated tone.

“This thing can even withstand Cannon Fire from the likes of Rocket Launchers. If you didn’t have one of these in the Game, you slept with one eye open. Patch it up with Reinforcement Materials and Fireproof Walls to upgrade the base to a Medium or a Large, and that will boost its Defense.”

“Cannon Fire...? It all sounds complicated, Master Demon Lord...”

“Well, it just means it’s sturdy. Aku, we’re sleeping in this base tonight. I’m too fragile to sleep out in the open.”

“Yes, sir! You can leave the chores to me!”

The pair, in their own world, strolled into the base, humming along, oblivious to the foreboding air around them.

SP — down to 10.

You Unlocked Some Information!!

Base

Created by combining a Survival Pack and a Defense Pack. Decreases damage inflicted by other players, and even protects against Cannon Fire. Since some Cannon Fire can damage SP or an armor's durability, remaining unprotected against it is often catastrophic. A Base, true to its name, is equipped with a cot, an oil-drum bath, and a simple kitchen, allowing the player to survive inside it for a while. However, Medium and Large bases come with increasingly extravagant interior. Made with very durable material, it can even withstand attacks from RPG-7s or RPG-29s. In this world, taking down a Base is no easy task. The game's design allows the player to fold the base up to easily carry around when it's not set up.

Looming Shadows

--On their way to the Holy City of Holylight.

(So this is what a bath is...!)

From the moment the Demon Lord and Aku had settled at their lodging for the night, Aku was greeted by one pleasant surprise after another. Aku's first impression of the place was that it was very sturdy, in complete contrast to the houses back at the village. Aku could easily imagine the building withstanding a charging bear or boar. In fact, the child felt confident that not even a powerful monster could breach this structure. The lodge even held cots and a kitchen. Aku couldn't help but feel like a respectable member of society, somehow. Back home, the child's bed was made by laying a cheap piece of fabric on a pile of straw. Compared to that, this was heavenly.

(But best of all, this bath...!)

The Demon Lord had called it an 'oil drum bath.' Imagine Aku's shock upon finding hot water in such a place! This was an unbelievable height of luxury for the child. Even as Aku bathed in it, the child's trembling didn't stop.

(I don't get why Master Demon Lord was apologizing, though...) His exact words were 'Sorry. This lodge is the best I can do right now.' Aku didn't really understand what he was saying, to be honest. Of course this was the best he could do, Aku thought. The child could not begin to imagine any more luxury than this.

(I wonder where Master Demon Lord came from? I thought it was the Dark Realm or something, but...) Aku recalled him mentioning 'the Empire' after a few drinks. As the child was pondering such things, the Demon Lord called from the other side of the door.

"Sorry it's so cramped in here. But just you watch... One day, I'll set up a hot springs resort."

The Demon Lord walked away. Some of what the Demon Lord said was difficult for Aku to comprehend. The child wished for a smarter mind to understand him better, but soon realized that the wish might have been futile.

(What's a "hot springs resort", anyway?)

Curious, Aku continued to enjoy the bath... It was a peaceful sight, indeed.



Meanwhile, the Demon Lord was laying on his bed, looking up at the night sky through the window.

(There's a moon in this world, too...)

He could feel himself gradually sobering up. Some time had passed since the Demon Lord came to this world, but it didn't seem like he would naturally hop back to his own world any time soon.

(Will unlocking all the Administrator commands really do the trick...?) The Administrator commands, of course, were related to the game. As such, there was no 'return to the real world' command or the like. If he really was summoned by that false-god-looking statue, finding a similar entity and wishing to it seemed like the Demon Lord's only hope.

(The big problem, though, is whether or not I can return to the same day.) As far as the Demon Lord was concerned, if he could eventually return to the real world on the same day he had left it, there was no problem. However, if time in the real world flowed the same as it did here, that would cause some issues. If he returned to the real world even just a month later... well, a person missing for a month would be a big deal. 'Oops, just spent a month in another world' wouldn't cut it. The truth would only get him into a padded room.

(For now, I guess I just have to try and unlock more commands...) But he had no idea what to do next. Keep farming SP? Make some money? Find specific items? In any case, not doing anything wouldn't help. It could even be constructive if he just treated it like a vacation and enjoyed himself.

(What's waiting for me back there, anyway...? Day after day of the same old job.) "Master Demon Lord! The Oil-Drum is amazing!"

The Demon Lord let out a laugh. He didn't know what to say to Aku, who found so much joy in that sorry excuse for a bath. Although, if the Demon Lord had lived through post-WWII Japan, he might have shared the sentiment. Now that they were travelling together, the Demon Lord imagined what kind of reaction he could get out of her with his other Administrator commands unlocked. Considering Aku's upbringing, the Demon Lord couldn't help but try to fill the role of a parent.

(A hot springs resort, maybe...? I might as well recreate the Sleepless Castle.) The Sleepless Castle was the final area of the game, where Hakuto Kunai and all of his close subjects resided. The backstory of the place was that a select few of the world's wealthiest were invited there to watch the Game live. In addition to the Demon Lord's subjects, the impenetrable fortress was guarded with 2000 soldiers. The Demon Lord wondered how Aku would react if he showed her this ultimate showcase of the Empire's technology. While it was a blood-soaked battleground, where countless players were taken down over the course of a decade and a half, the Sleepless Castle would also guarantee them safety from all. It had only been conquered once during its existence, after all. Besides, if the Demon Lord could summon his subjects, that would allow for many more options going forward.

"Master Demon Lord, I washed myself with bubbles again!"

"Hm...? Yeah, you smell good."

"Really? Hee hee hee..."

Aku giggled with joy and climbed into the bed the Demon Lord was laying on. Her blond hair made it seem like a well-groomed kitten had curled up next to him.

"Woah, you're going to sleep in my bed?"

"May I?"

"Look, I know you think I'm some old guy who could be your dad, but I need to tell you something. I... The real me, is not a dad. I'm not that old. Got it?"

"I don't know what you're saying, Master Demon Lord."

As the Demon Lord continued to try, futilely, to get his point across, the night thickened.

—A few days later... On a mountain, somewhere in Holylight.

Forty or so bandits were swarming on the foothills. They had heard the news that a Holy Maiden was about to pass here on a carriage. Naturally, they couldn't let such a perfect opportunity slide. They were poised to attack. The

bandits, known as the Mole, were infamous around these parts for not being picky about their targets. No matter how weak or strong, they would attack without discrimination. Naturally, that led to some painful defeats, but their numbers only grew. Perhaps that was an indication of how unstable this country was.

The leader of the reckless bunch was calmly sitting on a stump, gazing towards the foot of the mountain. He had been in the highway robbery business since his teens, and now was a rather infamous leader of the gang. While he was now over fifty years in age, he was as built as ever. As he calmly tilted his bottle, a silhouette appeared at the foot of the mountain. The leader immediately determined that it wasn't their target. But another thought crossed his mind while watching two people walking through a land so remote that it could be classified as a wasteland. Could it be a trap? More than once, they had jumped on a small group of seemingly ideal prey only to be surrounded by the hidden, much larger team, and they were forced to flee in bitter defeat. Then, it clicked. The leader caught on to the Holy Maiden's tactic. She was baiting them out in the open, where she could easily take them down, he thought.

"...Heh. It's not going to be that easy, miss Holy Maiden."

"Boss, what should we do with those two?"

"Kill 'em... We'll retreat before the rest of them show up from behind us."

Thanks to his experience, the leader always made decisions fast. In the middle of action, there was no time for indecision. Stasis led directly to death. The leader recalled his many comrades who died of indecision in a critical moment. One of his henchmen loaded his bow without a sound and loosed it in a single breath. There was no hesitation in snuffing out a life here.

On the other hand, the Demon Lord noticed the attack, and let out a yawn.

(What a joke...)

He nearly sighed watching the arrow whizzing towards him. The attacker didn't seem to make any effort to conceal their presence, and the arrow itself was nothing special. No effects on it at all. In the Game, this would have been a Rain of Arrows, an equipped skill that loosens two dozen insta-kill arrows. To

the Demon Lord, this arrow seemed like it was loosed carelessly at some random pedestrian.

(Should I just take it...?)

The Demon Lord braced himself to take the hit. He wanted to test how much damage it would do. Since he hadn't encountered any enemies since that one devil, he never had the opportunity to perform any experiments in combat. Just in case, he had already turned off the automatic Retaliation and automatic Countering features. It was difficult to trust them, since the Demon Lord couldn't gauge what the criteria were to activate those features. Worst case scenario, he could inadvertently retaliate to a harmless action with lethal force. Against a bizarre monster, that wouldn't be a problem, but against a human? That didn't sit right with the Demon Lord.

"Aku, step back."

"...What?"

The whizzing arrow seemed almost stationary to the Demon Lord. Which wasn't a surprise. In the game, the Demon Lord dodged machine gun fire and even shotgun scatter shots. When the arrow finally arrived in front of the Demon Lord, a small ping was heard before the arrow could hit him. Countless black octagonal shields surrounded the Demon Lord. Intercepted by one of them, the arrow fell to the ground, having lost all of its momentum.

"Under level 30, huh...? What a noob."

Only players who had reached level 30 (the maximum in the game) could damage the final boss. Players below that level didn't even deserve a battle against the Demon Lord. Of course, even players with maxed-out stats couldn't keep up against him. Just like the final boss of an RPG, it was nearly impossible to damage the Demon Lord without burning through all sorts of items. Worst of all, his HP was astronomical.

"Why are you trying to get the kill from the nosebleeds up there?"

The Demon Lord called out, and the bandits finally showed themselves. Each of them wore shock and dismay on their expression.

"What the hell did you do...!? You gotta be a mage!"

“You think you’re invincible, huh? Once your Stamina runs out, you’re just a punching bag!”

“Punching bag, huh...? Good to know.”

A grin grew across the Demon Lord’s face. Aku had mentioned magic to him, but she didn’t know much about it, leaving him more curious about the subject than he preferred.

“Any mages over there? Hit me with your best shot.”

The bandits stirred. This was beyond cocky. The Demon Lord was acting as if he were performing experiments on mere insects. With his patience run thin, the leader walked up, his beard swaying.

“You talk pretty big game, old man.”

“Who’re you calling an old man!?”

The Demon Lord couldn’t help but shout. Stunned, the leader fell speechless as awkward silence filled the mountain.

“I’m the leader of the Mole, Wo Wungol. You’re...”

“Own Goal?”

“Wo Wungol! Why are you saying it like that!?”

“...So what do you want, Safety Man?”

“Safety...! You got mud in your ears!?”

This petty argument between two middle-aged men was not pretty to watch.
(Hey... I recognized his face... I think.)

The Demon Lord stared at the leader, who was puffing his chest, arms crossed. He tried in vain to recall where he had seen this man, but he didn’t know anyone with such a wild beard. In fact, he imagined not many men in the entirety of Japan would look like such a stereotypical bandit.

“You’re pretty filthy, huh...? You got a neckbeard going. You look like you haven’t bathed in a year.”

“Huh! Like I haven’t bathed? I don’t know what kind of money you’ve got, but

you're pissing me off!"

Reacting to their leader's rage, the bandits ran down the mountain, surrounding the pair.

"M-Master Demon Lord! We're in trouble... Let's make a run for it!"

Aku yelled, her skin glowing from the past few nights spent taking an oil-drum bath. A glow that really made her look out of place among the dusty, middle-aged men around her.

"Demon Lord...? You make this kid kiss your ass like that, huh, old man?"

One of the bandits burst out laughing, causing a roar of laughter and knee-slapping among the rest. A vein popped up on the Demon Lord's forehead, but who could blame the bandits for laughing? They could only imagine a man well into his middle-age playing pretend as the Demon Lord. The problem was, of course, that this man was the real deal.

"Alright... Let's play a game, then..."

With that, the Demon Lord flicked the forehead of the man who first laughed, with his finger. He was blown away, as if by a gust of wind, and skipped across the ground a few times before rolling to a halt like a tumbleweed. By the time he had stopped, the bandit was twitching here and there, knocked out cold.

"Now, it's your turn... Oh, you can't get up? This one goes to me, then."

With a grimace, the Demon Lord looked at the bandits. They had all been speechless, but eventually went into a tizzy. Watching them, the Demon Lord cackled: "Own goal, indeed. I suppose that's your goal over there, where he went tumbling."

"Shut up! What the hell did you do!?"

"He's got some sort of spell on his finger!"

...A spell, you say?

Suddenly, a voice was heard from the distance, drawing the bandits' attention. In an instant, screams and wails echoed through the mountain. A golden light sparked out of the source of the voice, reducing the bandits to shreds.

You Unlocked Some Information!

Equipped Skills

These can be activated at will, upon the first attack against an enemy. A hellish chain attack that combos from a player's First to Second to Third skills. With Kunai's Attack stat, the thought of chaining this off until the Third skill would terrify any enemy. In the game, while it was powerful, it used up most of the user's weapon stock, making it a double-edged sword. If the weapon was a gun, it would empty the magazine. In a heated battlefield, it wasn't uncommon to die while trying to reload. Kunai's weapon was unique, though, and had infinite stock.

Holy Maiden

“I didn’t expect to find filthy bandits on my way to take down the Demon Lord.”

The Holy Maiden, Luna, was smiling. In spite of her very cute face, her actions were ruthless. The golden light she emitted had just torn five of the bandits to pieces.

“Damn it... We’re out of here, boys!”

“Ugh, idiots. You don’t really think you can get away from me, can you?”

Luna raised her staff adorned with small wings, and began her incantation. Immediately, golden light began to gather around it. She was controlling one of the elements of this world, and a very rare one to control, at that.

“Rip with gold... ‘Golden Blade’!”



The next moment, countless golden blades shot out of Luna's staff, tearing six of the bandits to shreds. Watching this, the Demon Lord felt a drop of cold sweat trickle down his forehead.

(You gotta be kidding me...!)

True, the Demon Lord was taken by surprise at his first encounter with magic. It was also true that the power of the spell scared him. But what shocked him the most was that such a young girl just killed all of those people without a second thought.

(Can we make a run for it...?)

He thought for a second, but immediately vetoed the idea. The girl hadn't come alone, but with an army. As soon as the Demon Lord saw them, his mind was made up. He whipped out the Base, and threw Aku into it.

"Wha-Mas-!?"

"Stay down in the corner. Got it?"

The girl who cast the spell was now staring at the Demon Lord, which was only natural after he materialized a building out of thin air.

"What's this...? Are you a mage? Or is it just a magical item?"

Without answering, the Demon Lord lit a cigarette he took out from his coat pocket. Truth be told, he didn't think he could keep his cool without a smoke or two. Could he withstand that attack? The thought terrified him. That being said, showing the girl any sign of weakness was out of the question. Desperately, the Demon Lord kept face.

While she looked no older than a child, the girl had killed those men without any hesitation. The girl, in the meantime, seemed interested in the Base. She walked up to it, touching it here and there, peering inside. Her display of curiosity was the first age-appropriate demeanor she had shown so far. Even her innocent demeanor, though, scared the Demon Lord.

"I've never seen this kind of material before... You. Make this a gift to me. I just might let you live."

"Is that a deal, mademoiselle? Any assurance that your promise will be kept?"

“Huh...!? Who do you think you’re talking to, peasant?”

“The thing is, you’ve failed to introduce yourself so far.”

He answered, blowing out smoke with a veil of nonchalance. On the inside, his heart was pounding. Still, the Demon Lord tried his best to maintain a calm, confident air about him. Since he didn’t know the extent of her powers, he figured the best course of action was to resolve this peacefully, if possible.

“What a hick... I can’t expect more from a filthy bandit, I guess.”

The Demon Lord wasn’t too happy about being seen as one of the bandits. Out of all people, why would he work for a man named Own Goal? That was the kind of name that practically guaranteed a knife in your back.

“Miss Holy Maiden... He ain’t one of us, just so you know,” Own Goal said with a grimace.

(Yeah, you tell her! Don’t drag me into your murder fest!) While he was frustrated about being roped into a fight he had nothing to do with, the Demon Lord couldn’t ignore that particular phrase.

(Hold on... ‘Holy Maiden’...?)

According to Aku, the Holy Maidens were three of the most powerful people in the country.

“Miss Holy Maiden... This old man calls himself the Demon Lord! Ha ha ha ha!”

“What!?”

As the girl reacted, the Demon Lord was raging inside.

(Shut up, geezer! Keep your mouth shut, you geezer! You want to die, geezer!? I’ll kick your ass, you geezer!) Having his plan for a peaceful resolution wrecked (on top of being called on old man, no less), the Demon Lord couldn’t help but explode: “You’re really hell-bent on killing your own team, huh, Own Goal? Then do it already! Have a habanero hard-boiled egg thrown in your face at the airport and die! You piece of space debris!”

“What the hell are you... And it’s Wo Wungol! Separate the names right, you moron!”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up!”

The girl shouted in a tantrum after listening to this for a while. A golden ray shot out of her staff. Actually, this was what the Demon Lord was waiting for. He immediately hid himself behind the Base (opposite the corner where Aku was laying low, of course). The golden blades crashed into the Base. While their velocity dropped considerably, they didn't die completely, allowing the blades to reach the Demon Lord.

“Agh...”

(This... is magic...!)

While he instinctively covered his face with his hands, they were now in throbbing pain. In exchange for the pain, though, the Demon Lord learned a few things. The Base did, in fact, lessen the damage of magic spells. On the other hand, his most-prized armor, Assault Queller, didn't activate.

(I doubt this kid is over level 30...)

Maxed-out players all had a certain aura about them. The Demon Lord didn't even catch a glimpse of it from the girl in front of him. Still, he couldn't deny the possibility of an even more powerful spell coming his way.

(I had a feeling magic was bad news...)

Beside him, Own Goal and a few of his henchmen were on the ground. As expected, the leader of the bandits seemed to take cover with a few of his own men. He was badly cut up, but still breathing. The rest of the bandits seemed to have scattered away, leaving the Demon Lord and Luna standing alone on the foothills.

“You're still alive...? Are you really the Demon Lord?”

“I have a better question. What's your excuse for attacking me out of the blue?”

“Excuse? Why should a Holy Maiden need one to vanquish evil?”

“Hmm. Those aren't too shabby for your last words.”

† † †

“Last words?”

Luna couldn't help but scoff at the man. Throughout their encounter, his attitude was utterly unacceptable to her. Where was his piety in the presence of a Holy Maiden? Unlike the bandits, this man was considerably well-dressed. While each article of clothing seemed foreign to Luna, she noticed that they were far too well-made for a man like this. Even his gestures and movements carried a refined sense of sophistication. At first, Luna even suspected that he might have been a fallen noble. However, this theory was proven false by his complete lack of knowledge about Holy Maidens. Luna concluded that he must have been a foreigner... Come to think of it, she hadn't introduced herself at all.

“I am one of the Holy Maidens... Luna Elegant, the Golden.”

She still wasn't sure what kind of man he was. Although she didn't suspect the Demon Lord to have a human appearance, she was well aware of how dangerous he could be. How he withstood her magic, how he materialized a building out of nowhere... Everything about this man was a mystery to her.

Despite her introduction, the man looked as if he had bit into a lemon. What's more, Luna could now sense a pulse of quiet rage from him. Perhaps he was a foreign terrorist, she thought.

“A kid like you, who blasts spells at people out of the blue, has the gall to call yourself elegant? I couldn't care less about those filthy geezers... But you could have gotten Aku hurt.”

“Huh!? Why does a criminal like you act like he cares?”

Apparently sensing the man's change in energy, her guards surrounded her. Normally, she would have ordered them off to get out of her way, but she couldn't yet tell what the man in black was capable of. The best approach, she determined, was to surround him and finish him off with a spell.

“Capture this fool!”

A cavalryman swung his lance at the man from atop his horse. The lance, however, didn't reach him. Suddenly, a pitch-black wall in a honeycomb-like pattern materialized all around him, blocking the lance. Everyone seemed dazed at the mysterious phenomenon.

“That’s too bad. It looks like you... haven’t earned the right to stand in my presence.”

The man in black gripped the lance, and used it to lift the cavalryman off of his horse with ease. Luna blanked at the ludicrous reality in front of her. Then, the man gave the lance a carefree swish, launching the cavalryman into the distance like a thrown pebble. The man proceeded to throw the cavalrymen off of their horses one after another, until the team of twenty five guards was nowhere to be seen.

(What... is happening...?)

Meanwhile, Luna could only watch in shock... What could she have possibly done?

“Ar-Are you... a giant, or something?”

Luna had heard about a race of giants with monstrous statures, who lived in the mountain ranges far East. Rumors had it that these giants could crumble steel with their bare hands. Just as Luna was convinced that this man had some giant’s blood in him, she was hoisted up in the air...

“H-Hey! What do you think you’re doing!?”

Before she knew it, she was being carried under his arm.

(Could it be... he’s going to kidnap me to do all sorts of unspeakable things...!?) “Let’s see if I can break the record for distance.”

“Huh?”

“First, I better teach you some manners, though.”

“Wha... Wait, no no no! What are you going to do!?”

“Man or woman... I don’t have mercy against those who dare attack me!”

What happened next would become the most embarrassing experience of Luna’s life. The Demon Lord’s face became stern, as if he was commencing a holy ritual. Then, he raised his hand up high. When it came down onto Luna’s behind... A thunderous slap echoed into the clear sky.

“Owwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!”

Luna's scream followed after it, but the Demon Lord didn't relent. His expression was still as solemn as that of an orchestra conductor.

Slap! Slap! Slap slap slap slap! Slap slap, slap slap slap slap!

A rhythmic melody graced the mountain. It was a splendid percussion of a palm hitting butt cheeks.

"Owwwwww! N-not my tushy, please!!"

"One for the right hand! One for the left hand! One for both hands! Back to one for the right hand! One for this is starting to get fun!"

The Demon Lord's powerful spanking continued until he was no longer amused by it.

† † †

--Holylight, en route to the Holy City.

"Phew... That was a good workout."

"Is-Is the Holy Maiden's tushy okay...?"

After executing that satisfying dose of punishment, the Demon Lord was leisurely walking along, carrying Aku on his shoulders.

"It's already cracked down the middle. How much worse could it get?"

"Th-That's not the..."

One step further, and... no, that was already a training-video example of sexual harassment. After such blasphemy against the highest power in the nation... most would consider even burning him at the stake to be too light of a punishment. Even after putting himself in such a predicament, the Demon Lord looked cheery. From that combat (if you could call it that) he had earned some SP.

"Think of all the things I'll be able to do... once all the admin features are unlocked... Heh heh heh..."

"M-Master Demon Lord... You're scaring me a little."

"Now that we've got some change, let's stay somewhere in town tonight!"

The Demon Lord had robbed the Holy Maiden of all of her money as ‘compensation for emotional damages.’ He had pulled this off with a straight face, pocketing the leather bag full of coins before Aku could get a word in edgewise. First, the incessant spanking, now robbery... He was starting to prove himself as the Demon Lord. Actually, more of a bandit than anything.

† † †

“I’m going to killlll himmmmm! Just you wait!”

Luna was groaning curses at the Demon Lord from within her carriage. The coachman’s head sunk back into his shoulders. At this rate, he worried, all of his hair might fall out by the time they would reach the capital.

“That man... No, the Demon Lord! I’m going to get youuuuu!”

Hearing this, all color was drained from the faces of her guards around the carriage. They didn’t seem to share her enthusiasm. How were they supposed to take on someone who withstood a Holy Maiden’s spell and threw their comrades like they were pebbles? In fact, the guards could barely follow what was happening with their eyes, let alone react. Every single one of the guards just made up their minds to never volunteer for the mission.

“You stupid horse-driver! Go slower! It hurts my butt!”

“I-I’m sorry!”

The commotion caused by that man would only escalate as he inadvertently continued to earn the Demon Lord moniker... His SP was now over 100.



Luna Elegant

Race: Human — Age: 16

Weapon The Staff of Ramd

A venerated staff, blessed by the Wise Angel. It reduces the amount of Stamina expended by the user, which is an extremely rare trait for an item in this world. Conversely, it can increase the amount of Stamina the user spends to give spells explosive power.

Armor Congregational Robe of Ramd

A venerated garment, blessed by the Wise Angel. It drastically increases the wearer's Magic Defense. Luna won't suffer a scratch from most spells out there.

Level: 17 — HP: ? — Stamina: ? — Attack: ? — Defense: ? — Dexterity: ? — Magic: 30(+25) — Magic Defense: 25(+25)

The youngest sister of the three Holy Maidens. They aren't sisters by blood. Talented members of the Holy Church are selected to be Holy Maidens, who are treated as sisters. Luna's talent for magic far exceeds that of her sisters. It's chilling to think how powerful her magic could become. Her problem lies in her lack of combat experience, leaving her helpless in any unexpected situation. Luna's extremely bratty nature was formed by her silver spoon-fed upbringing. While she plays nice in front of her sisters, she plans to overrule them all someday. The second oldest sister is Killer Queen, and the oldest is Angel White.

A City in Another World

— — —The trading capital of Holylight, Yahooo.

“The names of places in this country...”

“Is there something funny about them?”

The streets were clamoring with crowds worthy of the city’s epithet. There were no native specialties, but this town was located on the cross-sections of multiple trade routes, helping it garner goods from all around. The Demon Lord spotted some people with turbans on their heads, some warriors built like bodybuilders, and dancer girls showing most of their skin. On the other side of the street, there was an old woman performing sketchy fortune telling, and even a merchant riding a giant lizard.

“How can people ride those things...?”

“That’s a Sand Lizard. They’re very docile creatures.” Aku answered, cheerfully. She seemed happy to be able to teach the Demon Lord something for a change. Still, Aku’s knowledge of the city was almost nonexistent. The last time she had left her village was back when her parents were still alive. Those times were in the distant past.

Quite a few shops adorned the main street. The colorful awnings of the booths made it seem as if there was some sort of festival taking place. There were many poor towns and villages in the countryside of Holylight, but a select few locations seemed to be as prosperous as ever.

(I guess this is classism...?)

The Demon Lord had the vague notion, but the class division in Holylight was atrocious, not only between towns, but between individuals, too. The ancestors of those who had fought the King of Devils alongside the Wise Angel were now nobles, basking in their lavish lives. Holylight was glued together by their religion that worshipped the Wise Angel, but there were countless rifts within the nation. Some clamored for abolishing the system of nobles, and there was even a group that lost all faith in society and resulted to worshipping devils. However, all of those civil conflicts were only possible in these lands, far from

Hellion territory. In lands ruled by the Hellions, civil unrest was a luxury they couldn't afford.

"We've got money. Let's buy something."

"That's the Holy Maiden's money, right...?"

"What kind of Holy Maiden tries to kill people on first sight? ...She seemed to enjoy the spanking, too... She must be a Holy Woman."

The Demon Lord approached one of the booths, peering in at the merchandise. Some sort of meat on the grill, emanating the slight scent of black pepper. In an instant, his stomach growled. He had been surviving on the crackers stocked up in the Base. Aku loved the stuff, but it was pure torture for the Demon Lord.

"How much are these?"

"Three skewers for five bronze coins."

"Aku, which one's the bronze coin?"

"This one! Oh wow... There's even a bronze medallion in here. Wait, is that what a silver coin looks like!?"

Leaving Aku to her astonishment, he grabbed the small but ornately designed coins and handed them over to the shopkeeper.

"It's my treat, Aku. Eat as much as you want."

"Um, I know I've asked this already, but... That's the Holy Maiden's money, isn't it...?"

"A byproduct of self-defense. In fact, I must say my treatment of the situation was that of overwhelming compassion."

The Demon Lord had a point. Whatever the reason, Luna had tried to kill him. She was lucky enough that she wasn't killed in return. The only hiccup here was that she was a Holy Maiden.

"If this was a hentai game called, like, 'The Holy Maiden Ensnared — I don't want your baby!' she would have been a sex slave, no doubt. It's tear-jerking how compassionate I was in comparison."

“What’s hentai?”

“Woah... You’re not from around here, are you? You’re wearing weird clothes to start with. Slavery’s illegal in this country. Don’t even joke about it.”

The shopkeeper interjected. While the class division in Holylight was devastating, any and all forms of slavery was illegal. Anyone who broke that taboo would be prosecuted immediately, no matter their title.

“You make it sound like it’s not illegal in other countries.”

“Well, if you go up North or over East... They’re savages.”

(Savages, huh...? One of the girls at the top of this country seemed pretty savage to me.) The Demon Lord kept this to himself, and instead dug into the skewered meat.

After that, they wandered about looking for a place to stay for the night before spotting a particular inn... called ‘Gooogle.’

“These names are just... just...”

“You don’t like it...? I think it’s cute.”

Aku said. While its name might have sounded strangely familiar for the Demon Lord, it was one of the best inns in Yahooo. Most commoners would have a hard time affording a night’s stay here, but the Demon Lord proudly walked up to the counter. For his first day in a strange city, nothing seemed to scare him. The Demon Lord seemed to have run out of fucks to give.

“Innkeeper. I’ll take your best room.”

The innkeeper was about to say something when he saw what the Demon Lord was wearing. He wasn’t familiar with the style, but he could tell that each piece was made out of exceptional materials.

“Our best room will come to one gold coin a night...”

“Whaaat!? We can’t afford that, Master Demon Lord!”

“D-Demon Lord...?”

The innkeeper picked up on the phrase when Aku yelled in protest of the astronomical price.

“Y-You see, my name is Dee Menlurd. I’ve heard all the jokes.”

“I-I see...”

The innkeeper didn’t seem entirely convinced, but decided not to ask any more questions. He presumed the Demon Lord to be foreign, and chalked it up to either a foreign name or custom. Glancing at the innkeeper, the Demon Lord called Aku with the communication tool.

I told you not to call me Demon Lord in front of strangers! Call me ‘Brother.’

Really...? I don’t think anyone would believe that...

Then ‘Bro,’ or ‘Cuz,’ or ‘Senpai.’ Take your pick.

H-How about ‘Papa’...?

Are you kidding me!? I’m a millennial!

The fact that he proudly called himself a millennial probably proved that he was too old for Aku to call him Brother.

“A-Anyhow... One gold coin, was it? Here.”

He took out a gold coin from the bag and handed it over. Aku was wriggling around as the Demon Lord covered her mouth with his hand as the gleeful innkeeper showed them to their room.

Once they were in the best room, the Demon Lord looked out the window pretentiously.

“...The view’s not bad.”

On the inside, he was freaking out over the extravagant interior, but he had to maintain his alpha demeanor in front of Aku.

“W-Wow... I feel like we’re in a noble’s manor!”

“Hmph... One of these days, I’ll build a lair worthy of my presence.”

The Demon Lord talked a big game, but hadn’t yet considered what the ramifications would be to construct such a thing in this world. However, he wouldn’t say that he owed anything to ‘the world,’ which was such an abstract concept. Who would live their daily life worrying about the fate of their entire world? Everyone worked, ate, and slept for their own benefit. In the same way,

he would try and reactivate all of his admin features for his own benefit. The end result may very well be mass destruction, or it could be salvation. At this point in time, no one knew what the future had in store for our Demon Lord...

“So, calling me Master Demon Lord is going to cause a lot of problems. Can’t you think of anything else?”

“H-How about... Master Kunai?”

“Hmm... That doesn’t sound right.”

What a picky dude. He was the kind of guy that would struggle to decide which restaurant to eat at or where to go on a date.

“...I think we’re back at Brother.”

“No.”

Aku shut down the Demon Lord’s last-ditch effort. Compared to when they had first met, Aku had grown a lot, too. At this rate, she might prove to be an effective emergency break for the ignorant Demon Lord’s shenanigans.

“But that meat skewer earlier, wasn’t that so delicious!?”

“Hm...? Yeah, sure.”

The Demon Lord mumbled in response to Aku’s innocent review. To him, that meat wasn’t that good. It might not have been bled out properly, as it was chewy and gamey. That’s why, the Demon Lord figured, they had overwhelmed the smell of it with black pepper. Motivated by that experience, the Demon Lord had purposefully sought out a top-tier inn. At least for dinner, he wanted something decent to eat.

“Oh, but I love the crackers, too, of course. They’re a little sweet, and they make me happy inside.”

“Happy, huh...?”

Aku’s face loosened into a brimming smile. Seeing it, a shadow flashed over the Demon Lord’s expression. Those crackers were emergency rations. While the Empire did, according to the game’s settings, put insane amounts of effort into even emergency rations and improving their flavor... the Demon Lord couldn’t bring himself to even call it a meal.

“Then, let’s go on a quest to be happy again. Tonight, we feast.”

Hearing this, Aku skipped in joy to the Demon Lord, and held his hand. The Demon Lord couldn’t help but shoot a glance at her pitiful right leg, but he simply lifted Aku onto his shoulders.

“Before we go, though, let’s do something about your clothes. I don’t know how things are in this world, but you have to dress the part at a fancy dinner.”

“Clothes??”

The Demon Lord had completely forgotten that the money bag in his pocket belonged to the Holy Maiden. His conscience was clear in claiming the money for himself. If Own Goal had seen him now, he would have shouted ‘See! He’s the real bandit, here!’

And so, the Demon Lord and Aku went on their shopping spree.

You Unlocked Some Information!

Magic

Magic is activated by controlling the elements that exist in this world. The elements are Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind (the basic four), along with Light and Dark, which are considered outside of natural law. Some elements have an elevated form, but only those who break through a certain limit can wield those elevated elements. Some talented mages combine elements, as well. The length of the spell's name indicates its class, ranging from 1 to 10. Even the King of Devils with his ridiculous power for magic, the best he could wield was a class 6 spell. As to what Luna was wielding... The elevation of Light is the Holy element, but Luna's Gold element is a one-of-a-kind that has branched off of Light. Mr. Own Goal, who survived such an attack, must be holding a special skill.

Princess Evil

——Fashion Police, a popular boutique.

Bingo, the shopkeeper, gave the two new customers a quick and sharp, top-to-bottom glance. The leading one had black hair and strange clothes. A foreigner, no doubt. This city was kind to foreigners, though. It was only natural since it strived to be a trading hub. Even the people in this city seemed to be happy-go-lucky most of the time. However, the shopkeeper was concerned with the child following the man. Her clothes were almost as poorly made as a street beggar's. The contrast in fashion between the two made the shopkeeper uneasy.

(Is she a slave...?)

Foreigner or otherwise, a slave would spell trouble. Normally, slave owners would at least have them wait outside the city or have them stay somewhere instead of parading them around. Could this extremely well-dressed man be so oblivious to that unwritten rule?

"Hello, there. Are we looking for anything in particular, today?"

With a brimming customer service face, the shopkeeper approached the man. He had decided to try and insinuate the slave issue through innocuous conversation. The last thing he wanted was to take heat for something like this.

"If you don't mind, could you pick out some things for this kid?"

"For the sl... For this lovely child, you say...?"

"Huh? Yeah, this one here."

Buying clothes for a slave? The shopkeeper wondered if it was a fetish thing. Perhaps he was going to dress her in extravagant clothes only to tear them off, and... The shopkeeper halted his imagination. Business was business. No need to go asking questions when a customer is ready to pay. He just had to make sure that this girl wasn't a slave.

"I'm not good at picking out clothes for other people. I'll leave it to the pros."

With that, the man took out a leather pouch from his coat pocket. From the looks of it, the shopkeeper could see how heavy it was. He salivated. He might even get a gold coin out of this man.

“This one’s the biggest... I’ll take whatever I can buy with this.”

The man haphazardly took it out, sending the shopkeeper into shock. Outside of the pouch, it seemed to shine bright enough to light up the store. A gold medallion.

“A gold meda... S-Sir... Th-That would be your price range... today...?”

“Huh...? You want more?”

“I wouldn’t dare! Allow us to pick everything out immediately. Right now!”

The shopkeeper called all employees to tend to the ‘gracious lady’ who had been looking around the store curiously. Just in case, he had even sent for the rest of the employees who weren’t in for the day, all the while having an employee prepare a beverage. The shopkeeper’s mind was churning faster than it ever had before.

“And I’d love to have a smoke. Do you have an ashtray?”

“My hands! Put your ashes in my humble hands, sir!”

“Jeesh, dude! No. Just a normal ashtray and a chair to sit on...”

“My back! Sit on my humble back, sir!”

“Jeesh, dude! What’s wrong with this store!?”

While the two were stuck in an endless loop, Aku was surrounded by the employees and piles of clothes she had never seen in her life.

“Mademoiselle, how will these suit you?”

“I-I’m not a...”

Shortly after the Demon Lord and Aku’s arrival, the shop was bustling more than ever before. Even off-duty employees had been called, resulting in five employees mad-dashing around the store. They would swarm around Aku, showing her all kinds of articles of clothing and accessories, causing a tremendous ruckus.

No one could blame the shop's employees, though, since the Demon Lord had shown them a gold medallion. With the exception of the Holy Coin of Ramd (which has a limited number in circulation), the gold medallion was the most valuable piece of currency. Most people, save for employees of a major, nationwide trading organization, would live their whole lives without finding out what a gold medallion looked like.

When the shopkeeper generously offered a bonus of a silver coin to any employee who could pick out something Aku liked, the game was on.

Oblivious to the commotion, the Demon Lord was looking outside of the shop's window onto the bustling main street with a smile on his face. He didn't seem to dislike the energy of the city. In fact, it looked like the Demon Lord was finally coming to terms that he was now in a strange world. After a while, the curtain at the back of the shop parted, revealing Aku.

"U-Um... D-Do I look okay...?"

"Y-Yeah..."

The Demon Lord fell speechless upon seeing Aku in a white dress. When it came to certain things, the Demon Lord really was sloppy. He didn't know that Aku was a girl until this very moment... When, suddenly, a little princess emerged from behind the curtains.



“Will this be satisfactory, sir...? We would love to show you other pieces from our collection.”

“S-S-S-Sure... I’ll take everything that looks good.”

The shaken Demon Lord dropped his cigarette ash onto the floor, but the shopkeeper was shaken up worse.

“E-E-E-E-Everything... Sir...?”

Aku was about to say something, but the shopkeeper was much too quick.

“Everybody! Quickly! The best of the best for this mademoiselle!”

“Aye aye!” they all called back. At the end of the day, the Demon Lord ended up buying countless clothes, undergarments, shoes, *etc.* No matter what she wore, the Demon Lord said it looked good. True, Aku did look good in everything. Not only the more girly outfits, but even the tom-boyish styles suited her well. She did have a genetic advantage in this department.

The items he purchased were sent to the inn one after another, much to the amazement of the innkeeper. After all, the Demon Lord had booked the best room. The innkeeper couldn’t help clasp his fists at the arrival of a top-notch guest.

In the blink of an eye, the Demon Lord and Aku raised a storm of gossip around them. Were they foreign royalty? A mega-rich family from up north? If the duo had heard of these rumors, the Demon Lord would have burst out laughing, while Aku would have passed out.

“Aku, shall we...?”

After their shopping trip, the pair entered the restaurant attached to the Google inn. In lieu of his usual suit, the Demon Lord adorned a black tux over a white dress shirt. He looked quite handsome, even wearing a pocket square. Aku was wearing the white dress she tried on first in the clothes shop, looking elegant and beautiful. The other patrons of the restaurant looked at them just long enough as to not be rude. Suddenly, they had another interesting conversation topic.

“You don’t see those kinds of clothes every day. Is that what’s popular up

north?”

“I’ve seen some like that in the city-states.”

“Is she his daughter, do you think?”

“Nah. They’re not acting like it.”

“I’ve heard that they’re royalty from a small country.”

“Apparently, he’s ridiculously rich. Probably here to lay some groundwork on a business venture.”

“He used a gold medallion just to get clothes for that girl, right?”

“She’s spoiled rotten, huh...?”

After walking through tables full of gossip, the duo reached their table and opened their menus. The Demon Lord made some vague order at the waiter, and told him to first bring the best bottle of wine they had... as if he owned the place. His attitude only worsened the mistaken impression on the patrons of the restaurant, but the Demon Lord remained oblivious.

“The first thing he orders is the best wine of the house?”

“Maybe he’s not a businessman, and just owns a mine or something.”

Without acknowledging any of them, the Demon Lord lit a cigarette. There were things akin to a cigar in this world, but they were legitimate articles of commerce. Each cigar would cost a pretty penny. The Demon Lord’s cigarettes were of a white, which was unusual for this world. That fact alone drew eyes to him.

As everyone in the restaurant secretly watched, he sipped the wine that was served to him, and mumbled ‘nah.’ What in the world was he used to drinking? Then, he ordered the cheapest ale on the menu, took a gulp, and brimmed a smile.

“Now this is a drink for the salaryman. You can’t beat starting a meal with a pint of this.”

The other patrons had no idea that a ‘salaryman’ was a term for the 9-to-5 worker in a country called Japan from an entirely different world from their

own, their best guess was that it was a name for his homeland. Up north, close to a dozen nations were in constant conflict, and there were even a bunch of city-states in the north-east. From the perspective of the people of Holylight, the foreign nations were still barbaric and in a constant state of war.

Without paying any mind to the commotion around him, the Demon Lord poured ale down his throat as he chuckled at himself for ordering the best wine on the menu.

(No good comes from showboating, I guess...)

Cleansing his palette with the ale, the Demon Lord started cutting the meat that was brought to him and throwing it into his mouth. Unlike the meat he had for lunch, this one was of pretty good quality. In truth, he wished he could eat and drink the stuff made by the Empire, but he had to be conservative about his SP usage.

“I... must be dreaming...”

“...Hm?”

The Demon Lord looked up to see Aku’s food untouched. She had her pure white dress and even a pretty tiara on her head, making her truly look like a princess.

“Thank you. Thank you. There’s so much food, just for... someone like me...”

“Don’t worry about it. Let’s eat before it gets cold.”

“Of course I... worry...”

Aku’s powerful glance stopped the Demon Lord’s hand, mid-air. He was taken by her eyes. Each eye glowing in a different color, red and green... It almost seemed mystical. The Demon Lord couldn’t help but look away.

“Why do you treat me so well?”

“...It’s nothing special.”

From his perspective, he hadn’t done anything to deserve such praise. In fact, all he had done in this world so far was mercilessly slaughter a monster that attacked him, set the house of a man he didn’t like on fire, then spanked a Holy Maiden and stole her money. It was atrocious, come to think of it. Recalling his

track record so far, the Demon Lord nearly choked on his ale. Granted, most of the incidents were a result of self-defense, but could he really blame people for calling him the Demon Lord?

“I don’t know... how I can repay you.”

“You don’t need to. I don’t think you owe me anything, anyway.”

The Demon Lord said, as he chucked more pieces of meat into his gullet. Cold meat and lukewarm beer were things he hated most in the world, especially warm beer. Watching a pint go flat even made him feel the bleakness of life.

“Master Demon Lord, ask anything of me. I’ll do anything I can.”

“...Anything?”

Just as the Demon Lord replied, a shout was heard from the entrance. What’s worse, the door had been kicked down.

“...There you are, Demon Lord!”

There was the Holy Maiden the Demon Lord had thoroughly spanked the other day, her face beet red. Her breathing was fast, and she seemed excited. That was precisely why this joke of a Demon Lord only had this response to give: “You again. I don’t remember ordering a stalker...”

HMWII (the second Holy Maiden War) had begun...

Luna, the Golden

“...There you are, Demon Lord!”

Luna yelled, triggering murmurs around the restaurant. It was at this point that she reconsidered her actions. On her quest to hunt the Demon Lord, she had snuck out of the castle without telling her sisters. If she caused a scene, the news could reach the Holy City. If that were to happen, she could expect all sorts of repercussions.

“Hm. I didn’t know that, in this country... the proper way to enter an establishment was by kicking down the door.”

The Demon Lord snarked, which nearly burst a vein in her forehead. The two at the table were dressed differently from before. Their clothes looked extremely expensive. Luna shuddered, deducing the fate of her missing money bag.

“It was you...! You took my money!”

“First, you interrupt everyone having a nice dinner, and now you’re calling me a thief? I sincerely hope you’re not a fair representation of this nation’s government.”

“Shut your mouth! I had to save up that money for a long time!”

“It’s not like you’ve worked an honest job and earned it. No wonder this country’s in disarray with someone like you at the top. Why don’t you stop and listen to what the people have to say, for once?”

This is when Luna realized that the Demon Lord was derailing the conversation left and right, dodging the accusation. Her fists trembled in rage at the Demon Lord’s slimy tactics. To prove her suspicions, his eyes were wandering all over the place.

“Give me back. My. Money...! Then drop dead!”

“Moving on from false accusations to verbal abuse, are we? It’s unbecoming for a Holy Maiden, don’t you think?”

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Idiot! Pervert! Thief! Die!”

“Why don’t you stop yelling and take a seat? Have you forgotten where you are?”

When the Demon Lord said this, Luna sensed silent encouragement from the rest of the room. She could feel her grip on the situation slipping. How was this happening? He was going to weaponize the crowd against her!

“Why do you think I’ll listen to...”

“Do you need another lesson on your manners?”

The Demon Lord’s sharp glare engulfed Luna. When he slowly lifted his right hand, a shocking sensation ran through her rear end, while a mysterious urge pounded in her chest.

(No... What's happening...?)

Luna was sure that her face was bright red. Her breathing had gotten more rapid. Finally, she couldn't stand anymore, and slumped down onto the ground.

"I'm glad we could come to an understanding. I'm sorry for the commotion, everyone... Please accept my humble token of apology."

The Demon Lord announced, and ordered the waiter to provide a bottle of wine to each table, on him. Cheerful reactions rang throughout the restaurant. Any wine here wasn't cheap. With a gentle smile, the Demon Lord waved to the crowd in response before carrying Luna to their table.

(Why? What happened? How did I end up here...?)

Before she knew it, the Demon Lord had ordered food for her, and had it served. She was now joining them for dinner.

"It's on me... Don't hold back."

"You idiot! It's on me, if anything!"

"Hm, well... I guess you have a point."

The Demon Lord cackled. Luna, to her dismay, felt her heart skip a beat when he made a boyish grin.

(You perverted Demon Lord... Did you put a weird spell on me...!?) † † †

"Um, Miss Holy Maiden, I'm sorry! Master Demon Lord isn't a bad person!"

"What are you, stupid? In what world is there a good Demon Lord!?"

Luna shouted, as she shoved the meat and salad down her throat. She must have been starving. Watching her eat, the Demon Lord pondered: (Who are the Holy Maidens, anyway...? And the Wise Angel?)

How could he access skills, items, and even admin features from the game in this world? There was so much that he didn't know. Was it simply because... he was Hakuto Kunai? Was it because he was an admin of the game? Considering what to ask the Holy Maiden, the Demon Lord began by crafting an item under the table. Reaching into the pitch-black space, he extracted the small machine he created. This was called a Privacy Veil. It camouflaged any conversation that

the user wanted to keep private, using sound masking. In the game, this item was originally used to block any Communication attempts, but as the Communication system died down with the evolution of the internet, this item had lost its place in the Game.

(For where we're at... 'Restaurant noises' should do.)

As he set up the machine, any voices at their table blended into their surroundings, creating a veil of sound around them. The Demon Lord couldn't help but grimace, seeing the item in action.

"Luna, was it...? There's a few questions I want to ask you while you're here."

"Wh-What...?"

Luna looked at him with some intention to intimidate him, but the Demon Lord wasn't about to miss the perfect opportunity to ask all sorts of questions about where he was. From one of the top people in the country, no less. Ignoring Luna's attitude, he jumped into his questions: "Luna, have you ever heard of a country called Japan? Or America?"

"Huh? What's that? Also, don't say my name."

Luna glared at him with her pink eyes, but her small stature made her seem like a well-groomed chihuahua to the Demon Lord.

"Then... How about the Empire? Or the internet?"

"What in the world are you talking about? Are you a moron? Just die already."

(She sure has a foul mouth...)

The onslaught of insults from the Holy Maiden was wearing him down. Aku, on the other hand, seemed to have calmed down. She was working on her food, bite by bite, gleaming happily in between bites. Seeing her like this eased the Demon Lord's nerves a bit. Aku seemed so pure that he doubted if her and the chihuahua were really members of the same species.

"Alright, Pink Slut... What's the Wise Angel?"

"Wh-Wh-Who're calling a slut! Who do you think I am!?"

"Just tell me, you chihuahua. My time's precious, unlike yours."

“M-My time’s precious, too! What’s a chihuahua, anyway!?”

Taming Luna little by little, the Demon Lord asked his questions. He didn’t hear much more about the Wise Angel than he did from Aku, other than the fact that there were two angels other than the Wise Angel who vanished after sealing away the King of Devils. Apparently there was also the Still Angel and the Ember Angel, who hadn’t been seen in a long time.

(Three angels, huh... Uh huh... I don’t get it.)

He wasn’t even familiar with any western mythology, so he couldn’t get a grasp on it, or if there were any connections to real-life stories. He decided to ask about the other thing that was bugging him. The statue.

“Do you know about the statue placed in the Shrine of Wishes?”

Luna’s face twisted a little. She seemed to know something.

“Some heathens say, that’s the Still Angel... I’m sure they’ll meet divine judgment someday.”

“That was the Still Angel...?”

Recalling what the statue had said, the Demon Lord entertained the idea. It had said that it used to be white. In short, maybe it was a fallen angel, the Demon Lord thought. He now had a different impression about the statue.

(If this was a hentai game, it could be called “The Still Angel Ravished — Tainted by Flesh” or something like that.) Putting aside his runaway thought that would make Luna pass out, he continued: “What are the teachings of the Wise Angel that you believe in?”

“Oh, does the Demon Lord want to follow the ways of the Wise Angel?”

Luna showed a little smile, and began explaining proudly. Still, what she described was more of a self-help program than a religion. Working hard, self-improvement, overcoming obstacles. The Angel would smile upon those who work hard, gifting them with great power and protection... That was the gist of it. The dogma itself seemed pretty reasonable.

“So it’s only natural that some people and towns are better off than others. Hard work changes everything, huh...?”

A simple teaching, to the point. The Demon Lord contemplated it. If the world fell in place according to that dogma, those who worked hard would be rich, and those who didn't would stay poor. Looking at Aku, though, he doubted even this world was that simple.

"Better off from the fruits of their labor... I have always worked hard to get where I am."

"I-I've heard that... you were picked out of the orphanage for your talents, weren't you?"

"...That was a long time ago."

If what Aku had heard was true, the Demon Lord could accept that Luna did make it to where she was on her own merit. Maybe that was why she worshipped this dogma so much. More accurately, maybe she was fortunate enough to have her beliefs confirmed.

"I see... No wonder you're full of ambition."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

The Demon Lord had confidence in his assessment. Luna had tried to solo-hunt the Demon Lord. Not with either of the other two Holy Maidens, but with only two dozen or so guards. That seemed like the kind of ambition native to those who climbed up from the bottom.

"My guess is... the other two are in your way."

"Wh-What... What makes you say that!?"

"...Don't bother denying it. I can tell."

The Demon Lord said with confidence, but he didn't mean anything by it. While he was sitting at a nice dinner, he just thought he'd say something suave while he could. Luckily, Luna ended up spilling the beans herself. Judging by how easily she broke down, the Demon Lord figured that she didn't really have experience interacting with people. Considering her holier-than-thou attitude and potty mouth, he doubted Luna even had a single friend. To confirm his theory, the Demon Lord solemnly said: "...Loner."

"Urgh...! Wh-What do you mean...?"

“Nah, nothing. Just saying that Aku and I should be going...”

“S-S-Sure... I’ve got things to do, anyway!”

Luna’s eyes wandered about, as she hurriedly got out of her seat. The Demon Lord couldn’t help but chuckle at how obvious she was being.

“I’m staying at an inn called Gooogle. Come see me if you need anything.”

“I don’t need anything from you, idiot!”

Luna stormed out of the restaurant, restoring peace and quiet to the establishment. Watching her leave, the Demon Lord stood up to make their way back to the inn. After paying the check, he exited the restaurant to realize that night had completely fallen. Their elegant dinner had been interrupted, but the Demon Lord had gained a lot from the surprise guest.

“...Most of the time you’re kind, but sometimes you like to tease people, Master Demon Lord.”

“I am always a gentleman... To those who deserve respect.”

“The Holy Maiden is very kind. Master Demon Lord, you’re... Woah!”

Without a word, the Demon Lord carried Aku, princess-style, back to the inn. He couldn’t piggy-back her or put her on a shoulder when she was wearing such a fancy dress. The looks people gave him were like pins and needles to him, but he decided that what happens in Yahooo, stays in Yahooo.

“Y-You are... kind. I take it back...”

“Hm? It looks like we’ll get to sleep on a good bed for a change...”

Smiling along, the duo spent the rest of the night in peace... They were supposed to, anyway. As soon as they had returned to their room, Luna banged on their door. The Demon Lord opened the door to see her, teary-eyed.

“You idiot! Thanks to you, I can’t pay for a room!”

The Demon Lord felt a little sorry for her, seeing her this way, but there was no way that he would keep this yapping girl in his room. He was being fully judgmental now, but he expected her to even ramble in her sleep.

“Sleep on the street. Catch a cold, while you’re at it. With a fever.”

“What the...! It’s all your fault I’m in this mess!”

“Fine... Here, take your money. Stay wherever you want.”

Foreseeing the trouble she would be if he gave her a reason to follow him around, the Demon Lord returned the money bag. He figured that he should find a way to make his own money sooner or later. Might as well start now.

(Hm...?)

Despite returning her money, Luna showed no sign of moving away from the door. In fact, more and more tears formed at her eyes. While the Demon Lord was confused, Luna blurted out this bomb: “F-F-F-Fine, I’ll stay here with you two, if you insist!”

“...Huh? Did you hit your head, or something?”

He felt like he blacked out for the portion of the conversation that led to this point.

“Y-You’ve paid for this room with my money! Of course I’m going to stay here!”

“...So this is what happens when a loner hits rock bottom.”

“What do you mean, loner!? Move it! The best bed is mine!”

And so, the peculiar trio of a Holy Maiden, Demon Lord, and Aku, was formed. The night wasn’t getting any quieter.

The Night of Three

Luna and Aku were sitting on the bed in the hotel room, chatting cheerfully. It was only natural that Aku had changed into her pajamas since the Demon Lord had just bought them, but the fact that Luna was wearing her pajamas was definitely weird. Perhaps she was ready to stay the night from the moment she banged on their door.

“Admin feature... Item Folder.”

Keeping the two girls in the corner of his eye, the Demon Lord was storing away the mountain of clothes he had bought... except he wasn’t putting them

away in a dresser, but in the Item Folder. In the game, players could only hold up to ten items at a time, but the admin feature, Item Folder, had infinite slots.

— **Pure-white Dress**

— **Silver Crown**

The stored items became a row of text, and it seemed that he could materialize them at any time. Watching him move the items in and out of the Folder was reminiscent of a certain blue robot from a popular anime.

“Got it, Aku? Just call me Sister Luna.”

“Am I allowed to address a Holy Maiden like that...?”

“I told you, you can. My word is law.”

Luna spouted off, sitting on the bed, holding up her index finger.

(Your word is law...?)

To the Demon Lord, Luna almost seemed too prideful to be real. At this point, he figured that she had probably just come over since she was lonely in this town without any friends.

“Sure, I may be the youngest, but I really should be the one in charge!”

“Really!?”

(Yeah, right. This country would have been burned to the ground ages ago if you were in charge.) He assumed the youngest of the Holy Maidens was only in that teenage phase of wanting to act mature. Letting her prattle on could have led to Aku believing her nonsense, so the Demon Lord interjected with a disinterested tone.

“So, the girl with the flaming pants... Are you going to the Holy City, too?”

“The girl who... What’s that mean? It sounds kind of cool.”

Luna turned to him with glee, but of course, it wasn’t a compliment.

“It means you’re a liar... I think it’s a perfect moniker.”

“You’re the one to talk! You perverted Demon Lord! Get a haircut, idiot!”

While he didn’t know what his hair had to do with anything, the Demon Lord

could only imagine that she was selected to be a Holy Maiden on the sole criteria of her ability to throw insults. Clearly, that was the only explanation.

“Besides, you asked me like I was going on vacation or something. I live in the Holy Castle inside the Holy City.”

“Hm... Aku and I will change our course, then.”

“W-Why!?”

“I’m getting a headache just thinking about traveling with you. That’ll be unadulterated torture.”

“Th-That’s a little harsh...”

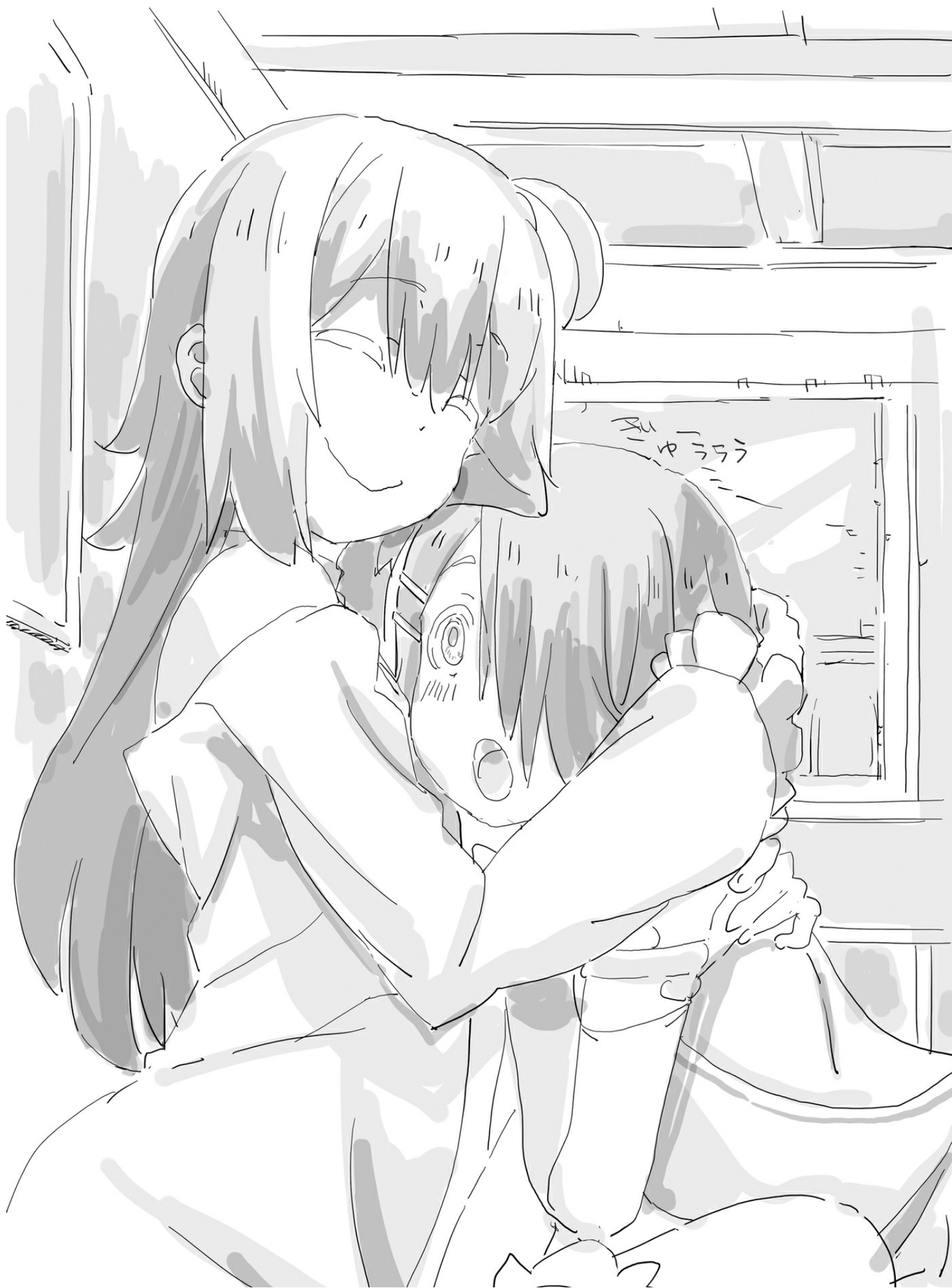
Luna said, acting defeated all of a sudden. The quick change in her demeanor startled the Demon Lord.

(Why is she upset now? Her mood changes at the drop of a hat. It’s like riding a roller coaster.) That being said, he reconsidered the possibility that most girls her age would have acted the same way. Meanwhile, Aku was speaking to Luna, trying to comfort her. As far as the Demon Lord could tell, Aku seemed infinitely more saintly than this Holy Maiden.

“Master Demon Lord, you’ve hurt her feelings... Let’s travel together.”

“Oh, you’re so good, Aku! Unlike this pervert here!”

Luna joyfully wrapped herself around Aku and nuzzled their cheeks together.



Watching this ordeal, the Demon Lord was assured that Luna had lived her whole life without so much as a single friend. That might have invoked in him some pity for her.

“Miss Holy Maiden. Master Demon Lord is very kind, too...”

“How!? His hair is so long, and he keeps staring at my butt! I bet he’s eyeing my peach-plump butt right now!”

(I take it back. She doesn’t deserve pity.)

The Demon Lord only saw Luna as a child, inside and out. Nothing about her rear end was attractive to him. While on the subject, her chest was as flat as an airport runway. So flat that planes could land on it during a storm.

(But the Holy City, huh...?)

He imagined this and that about the big city he had yet to see. If he was going to look into the angels, it made sense to head to the capital. That was just about the only action he could take, other than recovering the Admin Features.

“Peach Butt, can I find out more about the Ember Angel in the Holy City?”

“S-S-S-S-See! You’re after my butt! You Demon Butt Lord!”

“You’re the one who said it first...”

Luna stood up from the bed, covering her bottom. Her face had a tint of blush on it. Seeing her reaction, the Demon Lord wondered if the Holy Maiden had some masochistic tendencies, but decided to get off the topic of butts. His gut was telling him that the statue in the Shrine of Wishes was the Still Angel. Transporting someone from another realm seemed like the sort of power reserved for god-like entities. That particular god-like entity, though, had crumbled to dust. His only lead at the moment for returning to his original world was the Ember Angel.

“Oh, what do you want to learn about the Ember Angel for...? I won’t stand for any trouble-making in the capital.”

“It’s not trouble-making to blast off magic at someone on first sight?”

“As a Holy Maiden, I have the right to prosecute criminals!”

The Demon Lord almost couldn't contain his laughter. 'Right,' again? While on the subject, he switched to questions about magic.

"Luna, can I ask you about magic?"

"D-Don't... Don't say my name out of the blue like that... You idiot!"

(Urghhh... This chick is infinitely annoying.)

'Go tsundere on some teenager, please!' the Demon Lord screamed internally. Talking with this Holy Maiden only reminded him of how old he had gotten. Back in the day, tsundere girls and all sorts of anime tropes would have got him going, but with age, it all just became tiresome.

...So, a rather eventful line of questioning came to an end as Aku and Luna went to take a bath. Left alone in the room, the Demon Lord rolled on the bed. Through what must have been thin walls, he could hear the girls talking.

"Miss Holy Maiden, the bubbles Master Demon Lord gave me are amazing!"

"Bubbles... Aku, you sound like a child. A lady calls this soap."

He let out a sigh. He had asked Luna a few questions about magic, but just holding a conversation with her was excruciating. Here and there, her tsundere would activate, grinding down the Demon Lord's sanity each time. It was almost torturous.

(A 'bath,' huh...?)

The girls were ecstatic in their cold bath. Since this country was hot most of the time, apparently a cold bath was the height of luxury. For a Japanese man who had taken a hot bath every single day of his life, just a cold bath was unacceptable.

(There's a lot to think about...)

About how to make a living... About money. And about protecting himself against magic.

"See, these tiny, tiny bubbles come out, making your skin silky smooth."

"Come now, Aku. How could a bar of soap be so-oooohhh!? What is this thing!?"

(Shut up, already...! I can't hear myself think!)

Giving up on furthering his thoughts in the room, the Demon Lord headed out to the balcony.

"It cleans really well, and it even smells good."

"Krr... That Demon Pervert Lord...! Don't think you can break me this easily!"

Hearing this, the Demon Lord thought about calling her Asagi from now on, but thought better of it, realizing that no one in this world would understand the reference. Turning his back on the commotion from the other side of the wall, he stepped out onto the balcony to gaze out at the nightscape. There were torch-like installations here and there, and some along the main street were even as bright as streetlights.

(I guess those have magic using the Light element.)

Apparently, magic can also be used by infusing it into chunks of a special mineral, called Spell Stones, instead of casting spells on the spot.

(The infrastructure of this world...)

Luna had told him that anyone who could use magic would never go hungry. What he saw in the streets backed her up. Elements of Fire and Water, for example, must have countless uses for the people of this world without modern technology. Back in Japan, one knob in the kitchen produced fire while another produced water. He was witnessing the pinnacle of a fantasy world.

(I better start making money. Never know when I'll need it.)

The Demon Lord considered this, but wasn't too worried about his finances. He was willing to bet that he could sell off items from the Game at considerable prices. On a more basic level, even a Bottle of Water would sell for good money. He already knew that clean water was a prized commodity in this country. The problem was, a bottle of water from the Game was an item that healed the user's HP by 20.

(Selling something like that... Might only cause more problems. What else?) Since the climate was hot, he thought of an item called Fortune Teller Bar, a bar of ice cream on a stick that contained a fortune. Once the user ate the bar, their

stats were affected according to the fortune. A Very Lucky bar even regenerated the user's Stamina. This also seemed like a troublesome item to put out on the market.

(Back to soap, I guess...?)

He recalled all sorts of items, like the Whiskey Box, Pastry, Dumpling, Wheel of Cheese, Jerky, Canned Food, Lump of Meat... all of which healed HP or Stamina. Weapons and armor, of course, were out of the question.

(How about Bowls or Tea Cups... or Buddha Statues?)

Actually, the Demon Lord thought, those had better potential. He was already seen as a foreigner from a distant land. It didn't seem too far-fetched for him to have some oriental things.

(Maybe I can push it more...? Like playing a travelling art dealer.) Of course, the Bowl and Tea Cup were both garbage items with +1 Attack. The Buddha Statue, however, was a pretty decent item at +18 Attack.

(Alright. Maybe I'll try selling a Tea Cup as some fancy drinkware...) And so, the night thickened on the three of them and their lively room.

Meanwhile, a certain calamity was headed for Yahooo.

Killer Queen

A large piece of architecture was charging down the highroad... A gigantic chair being led by ten horses. There were many large wheels underneath it, running over and crushing stones as the chair charged towards Yahooo. Surrounding it were one hundred and eight elite knights of the Holy Knights' Order. It looked as if the group were en route to war. However, many of the knights, who all wore uniform, hallowed armor, had shaved heads or Mohawks. They looked far from a bunch of angel worshippers. This was the personal army of a Holy Maiden, Killer Queen. Anyone who didn't know them would have pegged them for a North Star gang of bandits. But this very battalion was the most trusted, loved, and respected group of fighters in the country, all for one simple reason: they trampled over any and all evil they came across. Whether a

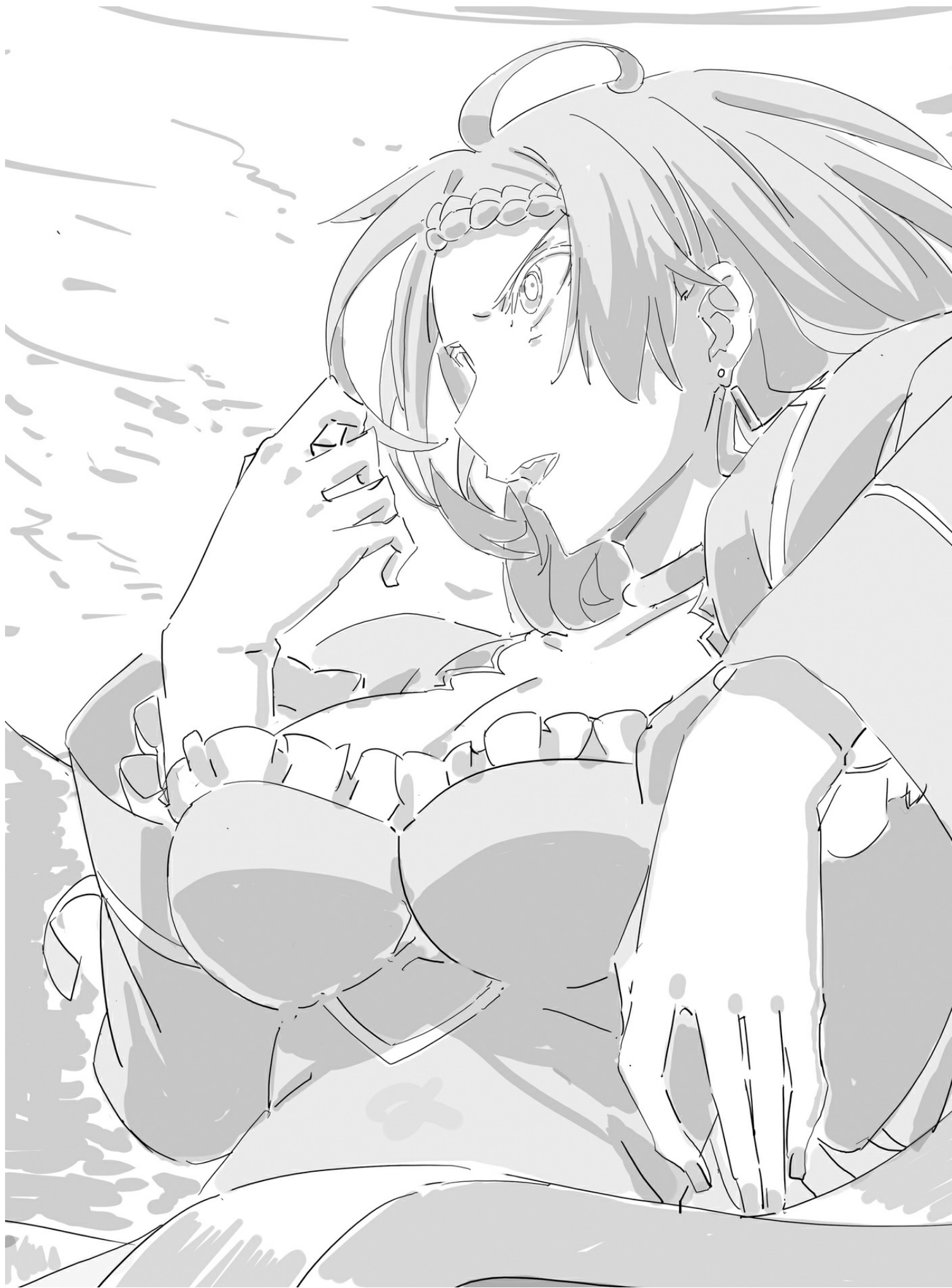
powerful mob boss or a weasel in power, Killer Queen left no man standing in the wreckage of her rampage. In her violence was a simple form of justice. Her carnage was let loose against invading forces, too. Once, the enemy forces fell apart and retreated the moment her army arrived.

“My Queen, we’re almost there.”

A towering man resembling a boulder informed his mistress, to whom he vowed his never-ending devotion. The man was called Mount Fuji. He used to be an unstoppable bandit around these parts. But now, he had sworn to serve his mistress through hell or high water. After being beaten to a pulp countless times by Killer Queen, he had traded in his life of crime for a position within the Holy Knights’ Order. The man’s mother had cried tears of joy and gratitude for the Holy Maiden. Killer Queen had many tear-jerker stories like this under her belt. She was a truly extraordinary figure in this country, whose merciless violence was always seen as just.

“That fucker... Making me haul my ass all this way.”

Her legs crossed high on her giant chair, Killer Queen tossed back her glass of wine.



Despite the speed it was going at, the chair was as smooth as a ride could be at the top. An exorbitant amount of Spell Stones were used in the construction in order to minimize Queen's discomfort.

"How courageous of her to try and take down the Demon Lord! Everyone is impressed, My Queen. She really is your sister."

"Ya dumbass, that fucker just wants attention. Besides, there's no such thing as a Demon Lord to begin with, dumbshit."

These sisters at least had their vulgarity in common. It might make one wonder what a Holy Maiden should be like, but all of the knights around her were overflowing with passionate devotion, all directed towards Killer Queen and Killer Queen alone. Despite her vulgar vocabulary, she was beautiful in a different way than her younger sister. She had long, straight, blond hair and a slender body, well-toned by battle. Her leg peering through the slit in her nun's robe was terribly alluring. Her eyes were golden like her hair, but they seemed to see through so much more than her younger sibling's. Rumor had it, no matter how tough the criminal, a glare from her eyes would have them begging for their life. Even the hood of her robe was pushed back. She almost looked like a heretic, but her beauty justified it all. No matter the world, beautiful people seemed to get away with anything.

"I have heard, My Queen, that the King of Devils was killed..."

Queen gritted her teeth. The big news regarding the King of Devils' resurrection was not one that reached her ear. It was kept from her through some politicking behind closed doors.

(What were you thinking, big sis...?)

With a tsk, the Queen pictured the one responsible for keeping that information from her. She had a good guess as to her sister's intentions.

(You thought I was going to lose...? Motherfucker.)

In truth, Queen would not have stood a chance against the King of Devils. No matter how deteriorated it was, there were hopelessly few candidates in this entire world who could have damaged that monster.

(Demon Lord, huh...?)

Queen vaguely imagined whatever a Demon Lord would look like. Before now, the Demon Lord's existence was exclusive to legends and fairytales. Through the entirety of recorded history, there were no witnesses to such a being. By any rationale, its existence was imaginary.

"Fuji, you believe in something like that? The Demon Lord?"

Fuji's eyes widened at Queen's question. She usually addressed people as fucker, or dumbass, or dumbshit, or slugbag, or... She rarely addressed them by their names. The fact that she did now was an indication of her sincerity.

"I have no opinion, My Queen. What you believe, I believe."

"Are you literally meat-brained, dumbass? You maggot."

Despite the insults raining down on him, Fuji was smiling with glee. The knights around him grumbled in envy. To them, an insult from Queen was a reward second to none. Calling this group a mistress and her slaves may paint a more accurate picture than calling them a commander and her soldiers.

Meanwhile, the Demon Lord himself...

"A piece from beyond the sea past the city-states, you say...?"

"Yes. A historical drinkware. Back in my country, drinkware like this can be a reward more prized than land or precious metals."

...had become a full-blown scam artist, preying on a merchant. The merchant's name was Gonaldd McDonald. He held a long-standing, large-scale art dealership in the city.

"This cup is a reward prized more than land or gold...?"

"Refined gentlemen prefer artisan drinkware over a plot of land. What good is gold to a growling gut? But to sip from a cup worth a large chunk of land? How gallant!"

With grandiose gestures, the Demon Lord performed his speech. He seemed more of a natural-born scammer than a Demon Lord. The thing is, his story wasn't completely fabricated. There were times in feudal Japan when drinkware were more sought after than land or gold. The trickle of truth blended into the

lies helped him remain confident in his pitch.

“I-I see...”

In reality, the Demon Lord’s confidence, dress, and his reputation as a rich traveler had given his claim some serious weight. To boot, he was extremely close to a Holy Maiden. With his hand stacked in his favor, no one would have dared to think that anything the Demon Lord brought in was worthless.

“It’s our first business transaction. Just this time... I can let go of it for one gold medallion.”

“G-Gold medallion!?”

Confident as ever, the Demon Lord demanded a gold medallion for it. The truth was that the Demon Lord didn’t comprehend how much any of this country’s currencies were worth, let alone what a gold medallion was worth. He simply asked for the biggest piece of currency he could find in Luna’s money bag. His lack of knowledge, combined with his shameless brazenness, was miraculously allowing him to pull this off.

“A work of art shines brighter with a worthy price... As you well know, I’m sure.”

“Yes, I can’t deny that.”

McDonald wholeheartedly agreed. He owned a shop with plenty of art pieces in a city bustling with trading merchants. This statement seemed to resonate with him. In fact, McDonald had never seen nor heard about anything like this drinkware. A piece brought in from across the sea by a close friend of a Holy Maiden... Such a product wouldn’t stay on his shelf for long.

“However, when selling this to a customer... I want you to price it no less than five gold medallions. That is my condition for this sale.”

“F-Five gold medallions...”

Overwhelming confidence and guarantee for the piece was shown in the subtext of this condition. He wasn’t going to allow a sale at all for less than that price. The Demon Lord’s confidence prevailed in the end, readying McDonald to bite the bullet.

“I understand. I agree to your condition, sir.”

“Excellent. Please, have this on me.”

The Demon Lord put another item from the game, a jar of Honey on the table. This was an incredible item that healed 60 HP and 60 Stamina. He had spent 30 SP just to materialize a single jar. In the game, this was just a one-shot item, but in this world, the drastic healing to both HP and Stamina would have an unbelievable effect. This jar of honey was akin to the Elixir, rumored to be the tears of God. A work of miracles, coveted by royalty, nobles, and adventurers around the world.

“Is this... honey?”

“Honey from the Emp... my country has special properties. Please give some to anyone with an illness.”

“How kind... My wife has been ill for a long time, now.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Please, give some to your wife.”

With a handshake, the Demon Lord concluded his business with McDonald. The Demon Lord came out rich from this transaction, but McDonald also made out like a bandit when a rich collector in the city scooped the drinkware off his shelf in no time. McDonald had made a ridiculous profit of four gold medallions just for being the middleman. On top of that, his ill-stricken wife regained her former strength the instant she took some of the honey. Even her skin seemed younger, somehow. From this point on, McDonald would wholeheartedly trust anything the Demon Lord brought in.

The Demon Lord, once he had made his way to an unpopulated alley, cackled up at the sky.

“Hah ha ha! I knew I could pull it off if I tried!”

After having to maintain his brazen confidence to mask his terror inside, the Demon Lord felt an immense relief.

“Now that I’ve made some money... What to do next?”

With a grin, he gazed up at the sky. Clouds in various shapes were leisurely floating by, making for a relaxing sight.

“It really doesn’t rain here, does it...?”

He hated the rain. It almost always reminded him of something unbearable. In that sense, the climate of this place suited him just fine.

(I guess there’s a lot of stuff to worry about if you live here, though.)

He could easily imagine that from what Aku and Luna had told him. Sometimes, the ever-glaring sun can dry up even the human heart.

As the Demon Lord was contemplating such things...

“Get out here, Luna!”

A shout pierced through the lazy afternoon. It rarely rained in this country, but on this day, a monsoon of blood would soon fall upon this city.

Satanists

Holylight, despite its classism and internal conflicts, had remained intact through the worship of the historical Wise Angel. That being said, there was a group far off from the national ideology. Not hedonistic bandits or robbers, but worshippers of beings opposite to angels. They were Satanists, worshippers of devils.

At first, the Satanists had only the modest demand for wealth redistribution. Over time, though, they had turned to call for the abolishment of nobles, and even accusing the Wise Angel for creating the nation’s classism in the first place. The truth was, the Wise Angel had nothing to do with nobles or classism. The Wise Angel itself had vanished after fighting the King of Devils. Many of those who fought alongside the Wise Angel at the time had obtained positions of power, later becoming nobles. The Satanists, though, didn’t care at all about the historical facts or their accuracies. The now, and their end, was all they lived for.

At some point, someone called Utopia had appeared before them. Ever since, the Satanists grew more and more aggressive. Finally, they had started worshipping devils in opposition of the angels, and performing random terror attacks throughout the country, before finally attempting to summon the

Demon Lord.

“Get out here, Luna!”

Queen’s roar reverberated through the alleyways. Hearing this, the Satanists were overjoyed. For all they knew, they had failed to summon the Demon Lord, but they had baited a Holy Maiden out. It wasn’t in vain, after all. They set their plan in motion to assassinate the Holy Maidens.

“Cursed be the Holy Maidens...”

“Cursed be.”

Warlkin, the leader of the assassins, called out, and eerie voices replied from the shadowy alleys. It was incredibly fortunate for them that two of the Holy Maidens were in town, when they would have considered themselves lucky to even take down one.

(With our secret weapon, our plan is foolproof...)

Warlkin couldn’t help but grimace in anticipation. If he had known that the Demon Lord they had waited so long for was just around the corner, he just might have fainted.

† † †

(Yikes, this chick... Was she born under the North Star?)

Picking up on the commotion from the alley, the Demon Lord had concealed himself in the crowd on the main street. He was staring at a woman atop a ludicrously large chair, surrounded by a band of skinheads and Mohawks. At first, he pinned them to be bandits or a circus troupe, but he kept hearing murmuring from the crowd mentioning the words ‘Holy Maiden.’

(That’s... one of Luna’s sisters...? For real!?)

She looked to him as if she was about to shout ‘I’ve no need for love!’ evoking even more strange feelings in the Demon Lord about the Holy Maidens.

“Oh yeah... If there’s a Demon Lord around here, show your face.”

In reaction, the Mohawks around her started screaming the same demand, flailing their clubs around. How could they possibly be a Holy Maiden’s army?

‘Bring out all the food and water you’ve got!’ seemed more like a demand they were about to make.

“I guess the Demon Lord’s a pussy... Too scared to face me, huh?”

(Shut up, you freak! Go back to your post-apocalypse!)

The Demon Lord shouted internally with all of his might. Who in their right mind would step in front of a bunch like them just to be like ‘Yep, that’s me. Demon Lord here’? The Mohawks would beat him to pulp in two seconds flat.

“S-Sister... Why are you here!?”

Luna coming out to the main street only made the commotion louder, much to the dismay of the Demon Lord. Things were most certainly about to get more complicated.

“You little fucker... Who do you think you are, playing with fire behind my back?”

“N-No! I just heard that the Demon Lord had appeared, so...!”

“You dumb piece of shit! You’re a useless sack on your own, so go cry in your room, miserable little fucker.”

From atop her chair, Queen thrust her middle finger up in the air towards Luna. A flawless display of disdain. It was at this moment that all rules seemed to have gone out the window.

“Y-You don’t have to be so mean! And I’ve been meaning to ask you, what’s with the stupid big chair!?”

“Huh? You got a problem with my portable throne...?”

Listening to the argument, the Demon Lord lit a cigarette without saying a word. He needed something to help him get through it. In fact, he doubted if the creature atop the giant chair was really a woman. Was it possible that it was a monster by the name of Thouzer, or something?

“I-I’m the one who’s going to take down the Demon Lord! You go home, Sis!”

“Take down something that doesn’t exist? Good luck with that.”

“He exists, too! He’s always after my butt!”

“...Huh? What’s this about your ass?”

(Damn it...! I thought I was ready, but I wasn’t ready for this!)

The Demon Lord writhed in embarrassment, barely keeping himself from curling up on the ground. Before he knew it, he was now the pervert lusting after Luna’s butt.

(Wait a minute... I can take Aku and ditch the city while they’re duking it out.)

He gripped his fists at his brilliance. Luna on her own was too much to handle, let alone her crazy sister. When the Demon Lord turned towards the inn in order to avoid that nightmare, a scream pierced through the street... followed by a spray of blood.

† † †

“Death to the false angel...! Firebird!”

“Woes unto the Holy Maidens...! Ice Hammer!”

Lights, red and blue.

(What... the...)

The unreal sight in front of him prompted a childish reaction from the Demon Lord. In the next moment, waves of heat and cold rushed him in tandem, nearly blowing him away. The rapid-fire spells tore through chunks of the crowd, causing a downpour of blood in this city block.

(Damn it...! Magic again!)

Amidst the screams and cries, he could even hear cheering. Out of nowhere, a group clad in black had appeared, attacking the post-apocalyptic Holy Maiden and her gang.

(I recognize that outfit...)

A quick recollection led the Demon Lord to the answer. They were dressed the same as the group of corpses in the Shrine of Wishes. He didn’t have a clue who they were, but they seemed to be against the Holy Maidens.

“...What’s up, Satanists?”

As a cloud of dust rose, she whipped out a ridiculously large metal club, and

slammed it onto the figure in the black robe in front of her. That apparently smashed his skull to bits, as the body fell onto its back, spewing a spray of blood. She swung around the hunk of metal as big as herself, massacring another figure in black, then another. Then, she let out a maniacal laugh and charged into the group of them.

(Holy Maiden my ass... That's a blood-thirsty beast!)

A hit from that hunk of metal would send even a lion or a bear running with their tail between their legs. The crazy Holy Maiden kept swinging the hunk of metal side-to-side, blowing heads off of her enemies. Not even a smidgen of guilt could be seen on her face, as she went on as if she was playing a friendly game of sport.

"Drop dead, you idiots...! Gold Geyser!"

With a swing of her staff, Luna shot out numerous golden spears. In the blink of an eye, ten or so of the figures in black were bloodied. Their blood flowed all through the main street, into the alleys. Immediately, the Mohawks screamed.

"Cleanse the Satanists!"

"Blood for the queen!"

"If we make it out of this alive, I'm going to have the queen insult me...!"

Screaming this and that all at once, the Mohawks and skinheads collided with the figures in black. There was no telling which side was the aggressor anymore. The two crazy Holy Maidens were on top of their game, too.

"Hah ha ha ha! Red is the new black, Satanists!"

"You should feel honored to perish by my spells! You demons!"

(You're the real demon here...)

The Demon Lord's resolve to escape the city with Aku had solidified. Who could blame him for trying to avoid the Holy Maidens, though, when every time one appeared, people had been killed?

Just when the Demon Lord was about to turn around, a man who seemed to be in a leadership position, wearing a different garb than the rest, produced a large box and opened it. A pitch-black liquid emerged and making peculiar

sounds, it spread through the main street. The man grimaced as if he had already won the battle.

“Our precious darkness... But it should be forgiven if used to take two Holy Maidens.”

In an instant, a strange energy permeated the area. The black liquid had spread wide on the ground, and the Mohawks had fallen to their knees one after another as it reached them. After seeing this bizarre sight, the woman with the hunk of metal shouted with agitation:

“Luna, back off! It’s Tartarus!”

“Wha... Huh...?”

By the time she got the words out, the liquid had reached their feet. They fell to their knees, powerless.

“Now...! Get them!”

The leader shouted. The black liquid was creeping into the alleys. People in the crowd fell one after another as it approached the Demon Lord.

(Poison?)

If it was, he had a neutralizer from the game. As he got ready to face it, the liquid kept spreading, while avoiding the Demon Lord. He sensed wariness from it. As if it was just staring back at him, observing. Maybe it was some sort of creature.

“Everyone, the blessing of the angel is gone! ...Take down the Holy Maidens!”

With that call, the figures in black attacked at once. The woman with the hunk of metal had lost her punch, panting with one knee on the ground. The man the size of a boulder put himself between her and the attackers, but even he looked pale, without an ounce of strength in his stance.

(This doesn’t look good...!)

While panicking at what was happening, the Demon Lord knew that there would be more trouble ahead if he jumped into action right now. The woman with the metal hunk remembering his face, especially, could spell the end for him. He could go into battle in Stealth Stance, but that would take away 70% or

so his combat powers. Since he didn't know what these figures in black were capable of, he wasn't willing to risk it.

(Maybe I should just craft a Grenade or something and chuck it into the fray?)

As the Demon Lord was considering brute-force solutions like that, the ring on his finger emanated a mystifying light, sending him into excruciating pain and dizziness.

That's right... Blow them all, and that woman, to pieces... Problem solved.

(Not you again! Kill that woman, and I become the most wanted man in the country!)

Despite his rebellion against Kunai's whispers in his head, they didn't stop.

But she, and this entire country, is trying to kill the Demon Lord.

It'll be self-defense, again. Your favorite.

Isn't it comforting? With the justification of protecting yourself, you can go on relishing in the murd-

With every second his headache worsened, until he couldn't stand anymore. It even seemed like the pitch-black liquid around him was resonating with Hakuto Kunai's calling. Ripples appeared on its surface, taking peculiar forms here and there. The Demon Lord expected it to swallow him whole if he let his guard down.

(Isn't there... anything that can get me out of this...!?)

With his quivering hand, he opened the Admin Features. Much to his surprise, he was greeted with a brand-new command.

Change Character — Non-controllable

(...Huh?)

Killer Queen

Race: Human — Age: 17

Weapon Bloody Conclusion

A ridiculous hunk of metal as large as the wielder herself. In exchange for being ridiculously heavy, its destructive capabilities are outstanding. Queen loves using it for its sheer durability.

Weapon The Hammer of Sigma

A venerated hammer, blessed by the Still Angel. In addition to its high Attack, it is imbued with the power of the four basic elements. By spending some Stamina, the user can cast some simple spells with it.

Armor Congregational Robe of Sigma

What used to be a venerated garment, blessed by the Still Angel. Queen's crazy modifications has left it with almost no resemblance of its former glory. There is even a large slit up the skirt.

Level: 18 — HP: ? — Stamina: ? — Attack: 28 (+12 or +20) — Defense: 26(+15) — Dexterity: 25 — Magic: 15 — Magic Defense: 5(+15)

The middle sister of the three Holy Maidens. As her stats indicate, she is more of a frontline warrior. Because of her expert skills and intuition in close combat, she is one of the best fighters in this world. Her demeanor is absolutely becoming of her name, and what comes out of her mouth are almost exclusively vulgarities. The lack of any male stronger than her has left her uninterested in romance, but she still holds onto the hope that her Prince Charming will come someday.

Dragonborn

As the saying goes, a drowning man would clutch at straws. A straw's a straw, though. It would break as soon as he clutched it. Still, there was a time for the man to clutch it, nonetheless.

With a quivering hand, the Demon Lord selected the command from his Admin Features. The voice echoing in his head disappeared immediately. At the same time, he was enveloped in a white light. It was bright enough to even stop the fighting on the main street as they squinted into the light to see what was behind it.

When the light faded, there was a man standing there, clad in white from head to toe. With that description, one might imagine a warrior of light or something, but his clothes were adorned with grotesquely bizarre text that read the following in Japanese: 'Best in the World' 'Bring it On' 'Leave You in the Dust' etc... All phrases that one might expect from the stereotype. On the back of the man's jacket, amidst the cacophony of embroidered text, was a long, silver dragon. Even the man's hair was dyed silver. He was a Bosozoku, a Japanese biker of a variety that had definitely gone extinct in modern-day Japan.



“Where the...?”

His name was Zero Kirisame — a character Akira Ono had created so he could play in his own game. Aligning with his backstory as a Bosozoku, he had a fierce glare. His eyes seemed to have been created with the sole purpose of giving his enemies ‘the look.’

“Wh-Who do you think you are...!”

“...Huh!?”

As one of the Satanists yelled at him, Zero responded with the look. He certainly had no idea where he was, but he seemed ready to finish a fight if one started. Zero looked over at the main street. When he noticed Queen and Luna curled up on the ground, his expression changed.

“Tsk. Getting off on bullying a kid and a chick, huh...?”

“Bastard... You must be with the Holy Maidens! Kill him!”

“Ooh. You guys... wanna go?”

Grudge has been set.

As soon as Zero muttered this, blue flames rose out of him. One of the Satanists swung his short sword, attacking him out of the blue. Zero tilted his head to dodge the sword without a word, and swung his right fist with astonishing speed. An unworldly crunch was heard, as the man did a 360. His face had been caved in to the shape of Zero’s fist. His nose was shattered, and most of his teeth were broken.

The man was twitching on the ground for a few moments before his eyes rolled back into his head as he lost consciousness. With a single blow so impactful in many ways, the Satanists fell speechless.

“I only need one punch... for trash like you.”

(Noooooooo! Shut up, you idiot!)

Akira Ono, trapped inside Zero, screamed in protest at his corny one-liner. This was beyond embarrassing. It was practically abuse. But alas, Akira’s voice

was heard by no one else, and he couldn't move a finger of Zero's body. It wasn't that he was logged in as Zero, but had changed his character. Therefore, Zero acted and spoke as he pleased, according to his backstory, which was that of a rebellious biker teen from the good old days. To lift up the weak and beat down the strong was the lifestyle of a traditional Bosozoku before they went extinct.

(Who... is that...!?)

Queen was transfixed on the man who appeared in front of her with a burst of light. For a moment, she thought an angel had materialized. Instead, there was a man wearing a silver dragon on his back. A rocking stud, at that.

(What is that blinding white outfit...!? Shit's unreal!) It even looked like he had carved Bindings all over his body. There were ways to carve magic directly into one's body, but that was a fighting style that literally drained the life out of the user. No one could withstand that with an ordinary mind or body.

When one of the Satanists had swung his sword at him, Queen couldn't help but let out a cry. But then, a flash of his fist blew away the Satanist along with her concern, sending the attacker onto the ground after a full 360.

"I only need one punch... for trash like you."

(Damn that's so coooooool!)

The electrifying line had struck through her heart. Some strange elation she had never felt before came rushing from deep within her. What came to her mind was an old prophecy she had scoffed at before.

When the Demon Lord descends on this land, so does an ancient light.

(That prophecy was for real...!)

What she had discarded as nonsense spewed by the old hags at the church was becoming a reality. There he was, right in front of her... the Man in Light wearing a dragon on his back!

"Wh-What are you... Who are you!?"

Another Satanist yelped in astonishment. Queen listened carefully for the answer. Where did this rocking stud come from?

“Scum like you who bully women... don’t even deserve to know my name.”

(W-Woman...? He called me... a woman...)

All the blood in Queen’sbody rushed up to her head. To her embarrassment, even her hands were shaking. She was already stepping in Tartarus and having her powers drained, so this wasn’t good. But this kind of shyness, Queen thought, may not be too bad.

“...He must be another one of the Holy Knights! Stay vigilant, kil-”

Before he could finish the sentence, the Satanist went flying. It must have been a kick, Queen thought. His moves were so fast that she could barely follow them with her eyes. She looked over at Luna, about to tell her that she wouldn’t want to miss this fight, but the little fucker was on her back, now, seeing stars. This bitch was hopeless, through and through.

“Ready or not... **First Skill: Kung Fu.**”

As soon as the man had said those words, it seemed like he had grown in size. What followed was a straight punch as fast as a lightning bolt. The Satanist who took the hit was dramatically blown away, snowballing through a few more of the bunch. The attacks though, kept coming like a whirlwind.

“Show me your moves...! **Second Skill: Close Combat.**”

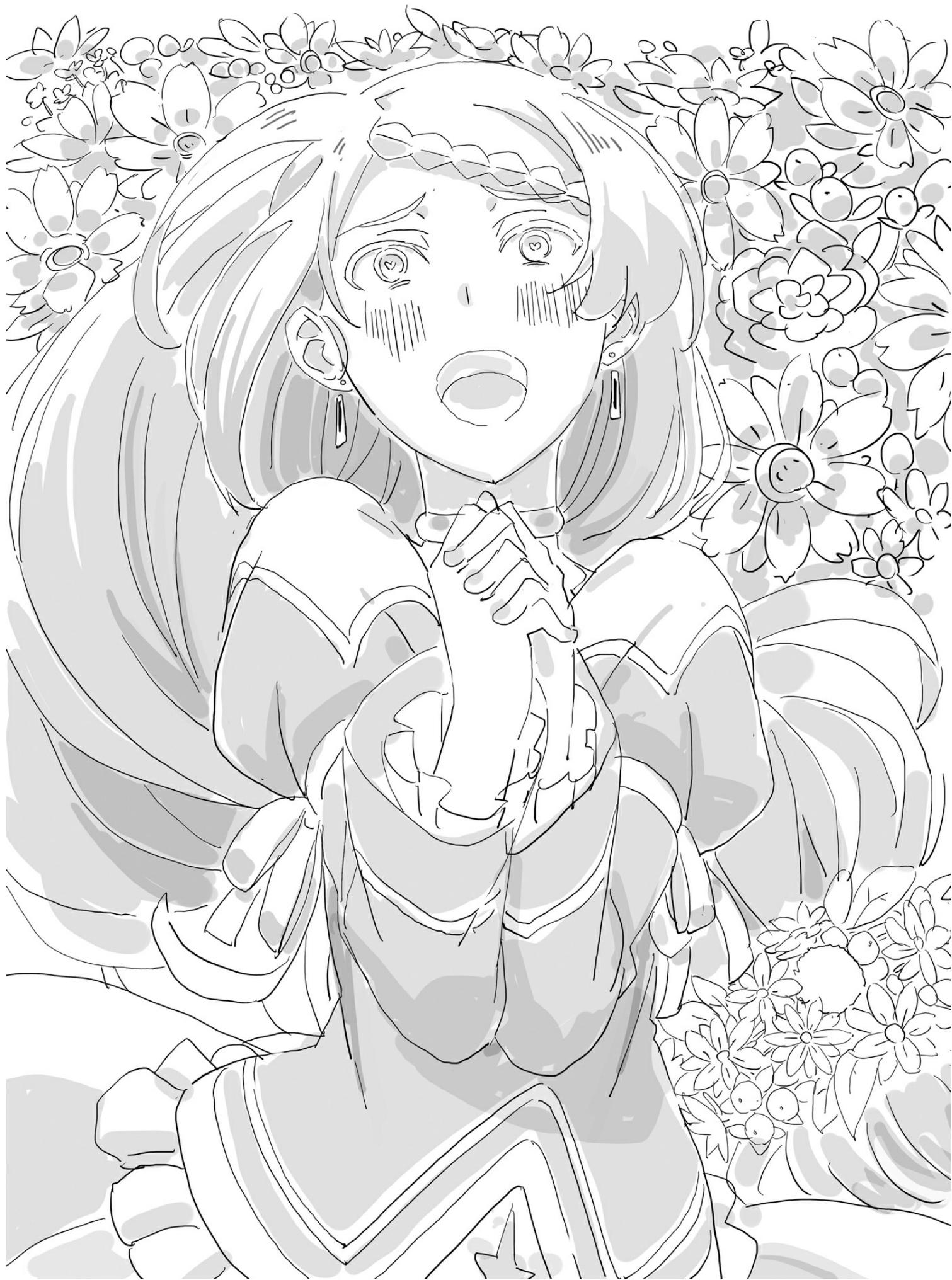
He dove into the crowd of Satanists, unleashing a flurry of countless kicks, concluded by a full-force, roundhouse kick. The whole lot of them were blown into the air as if a tornado had hit them, sending the Satanists into a panic.

“Don’t you know? You can’t run from a dragon... **Third Skill: Phoenix Fall.**”

With a ferocious three consecutive punches followed by a final one into the ground... a blast of energy took the form of a dragon as it carried 30 or so of the Satanists away towards the horizon. Now, every single one of the Satanists were on the ground. The only one standing was the man with a dragon on his back. After looking around at the carnage, he brushed his hair back with both hands, and dropped another electrifying line: “Give it a good millennium before even thinking about taking on a dragon, rookies.”

(He’s so coooooo!)

Queen nearly screamed this out loud. If her knights were not around her, she would have cupped her hands around her mouth and screamed it loud.



Before she knew it, even the Tartarus that was covering the block had vanished. Did the Satanists collect it, somehow?

“What a strange city...”

Even after such a rampage, the man hadn’t even broken a sweat. When Queen wondered if, perhaps, he really had some dragon’s blood in him, his piercing eyes were pointed at her. Queen’s heart was taken hostage by the black eyes that met hers.

“Chick over there... You all right?”

“Y-Yesh...”

(‘Yesh!?’)

She nearly slapped her own mouth, but right now, she didn’t feel like she could even show her face to anyone. It was terrifying to think what sort of expression she must have had.

“You’re pretty reckless. What’s a chick doing against dudes with shivs?”

(H-He’s worried about me...?)

Queen tried to remember when she had been treated like this last. It must have been when she was a young child... Although she didn’t know why, something warm and fuzzy was swelling within her.

“Well, just call me anytime if those scum pick on you... I’ll rush over, wherever you’re at.”

(Agghhhh, I can’t take it! My heart! It must have stopped like four times already! I can’t act myself around him, now... If he finds out, I’ll die! There’s no way I could live with it!) “U-Um... W-Won’t you... tell me your name...?”

A sickeningly sweet voice escaped her mouth. Queen couldn’t believe the sound of it. Fuji, who had been listening beside her, did a spit take. Queen made a mental note to make him regret it later. Thoroughly regret it.

“Hm? I’m Zero... Zero Kirisame.”

“Zero... Um, I’m so sorry... You got roped into this...”

“It’s no trouble. I got to protect my title of best fighter in the world.”

(I feel like I'll get a nosebleed...!)

How was it possible that everything he said struck Queen's heartstrings on the bullseye? Her heart was continuously crumbling to a sweet symphony. Queen was growing more confident... that this may very well be destiny.

"Looks like a lot of them are hurt. Tend to them. I gotta get going."

"I-I will...!"

(Zero... Kirisame...)

The silver dragon on his back was almost painfully bright. Until the dragon faded into the crowd, Queen didn't dare look away for a moment.

"I really found him... My destiny..."

A Bosozoku in the wrong decade and the most vulgar woman in the world... it really was destiny. Meanwhile, Warlkin, who had been bulldozed by the dragon, was running through the outskirts of the city, his face red with frustration.

"That freak... At least I was able to collect Tartarus...!"

He was sprinting through somewhere far from the major roads, carrying a large box. He alone had successfully escaped amidst the chaos. A good leader knows when to retreat.

"So that's the rumored Dragonborn... I never expected there to be two of them!"

Even as he ran, Warlkin's brain was turning full-throttle. The accursed monster with dragon's blood in it. A being that rejected devils and scorched the earth with a raging roar when the time was right.

"Those Anima bastards... Were keeping this secret!"

The leader of Animania, the nation of Animas in the east, was undoubtedly a Dragonborn. However, that leader was a woman. Throughout the entire continent, there was only a record of one Dragonborn. Even she was born overcoming miraculous odds.

"Those little... They're going to jump into the fray in this country!"

In addition to Queen, now the Satanists would grossly misunderstand Zero.

What was he doing now? Close to where he had slipped away into the crowd, there was a man curled up on the ground with both hands on his head.

“Damnit...! Kill me! Somebody just kill me...!”

His appearance seemed to have returned to the usual Demon Lord’s, but his mental scars would be difficult to heal. Beyond the point of mere embarrassment, the Demon Lord’s mentality had been thoroughly beaten to the point where even suicide flashed in his mind.

“Best fighter in the world!? You moron!”

The Demon Lord’s curses continued. Although, he had to accept it all in the end. Even Zero was a character he had created of his own volition. Sometimes, being an adult meant wiping one’s own ass.

And so, the appearance of the Silver Dragonborn who hated evil began to accompany the rumor of the Demon Lord’s arrival... without anyone else knowing that they were the same person. This misunderstanding would lead to cause major chaos in Holylight.

Zero Kirisame

Race: Human — Age: ?

Weapon **The Knuckles of Righteous Brawl** His fists. Infinite Durability.

Armor **Silver Dragon Biker Jacket** A traditional Bosozoku jacket, adorned with a silver dragon on the back. In the game, this was a rare armor with a special ability, leaving its Defense nonexistent. This piece of attire embroidered with various text just looked otherworldly in this fantasy world. Infinite Durability.

Item **750RS (ZII)** Zero's motorcycle. It's much faster than a carriage, and can carry him a long distance in a flash. In the game, it expended the user's Stamina, but had the effect of minimizing the amount of Stamina spent this way.

Level: 1 — HP: 165 — Stamina: 300 — Attack: 7 (+85) — Defense: 7 (+73) — Dexterity: 8 (+80) — Magic: 0 — Magic Defense: 0 (+55)

Equipped Skills: First: **Kung Fu** Second: **Close Combat** Third: **Phoenix Fall**
Combat Skills: **Grudge, Go Easy, etc.**

Survival Skills: **Sewing, etc.**

Duel Skills: ?

Special Ability: **Mad Flurry**

His stats increase explosively against a 'team' with a Grudge set on them. His stat increases are negated against anyone else. He can only switch Grudges up to three times a day.

Special Ability: ?

The Journey Begins

On the main street, the injured were being carried away as people hurriedly restored the city. Queen, who would have been leading the endeavor and barking directions at everybody under any other circumstance, was sitting on her chair staring off into space. She didn't seem like she could muster the enthusiasm to take charge of the restoration today. While she may have looked rather spineless now, Fuji wore a gentle smile looking at her. No man in this country was able to meet her standards before. Fuji had been concerned that his queen would end up an old maid.

"What a brazen man he was..." Fuji thought. The man showed no hesitation in taking on the Satanists, and it seemed like even Tartarus was avoiding him.

Tartarus wasn't the name of the liquid itself, but of a giant hole located in the center of the continent. For a long time, the countries up north had been at constant war. The hole earned its name when people from those countries started dumping the corpses from battles into the hole. Burial took time, land, and money. Those countries had cut corners, and decided to throw everything down the hole, rumored to be the gateway to hell. Dead men tell no tales, indeed.

Rumor had it, a weird liquid emerged from the hole now and again and attacked people. The black liquid, which was rumored to crawl out of the hole about once every century, was the nemesis of angel worshippers, as it drained everyone of their holy powers.

"At the very least, that man does not serve our Angel." Fuji concluded, and he wasn't wrong. Tartarus would have drained him of his powers if he had been using any holy powers or powers aligned with the angels. The truth was that he was just a Bosozoku. The polar opposite of an angel, in a way. He was supposed to be on the side of uprooting law and order.

"In any case, we must officially invite that man to our country." Fuji continued his thought... but he never dreamt that this man and the Demon Lord were two sides of the same coin.

—Inside a carriage en route to the Holy City, Holylight “...And then, that Dragonborn punched the ground, and people went flying! Like bwoosh!”

“Wow, that’s incredible!”

After leaving the battle-scarred city of Yahooo, Luna was proudly describing the battle to Aku, as if she had watched it herself. Luna was unconscious for the duration of the battle, but poor Aku didn’t doubt the Holy Maiden’s words. Of course, the Demon Lord was wincing at every turn of the story.

(Dragonborn...!? He’s just a Bosozoku punk!)

The Demon Lord contemplated jumping out of the carriage from sheer embarrassment. While his body was uncontrollable during the character switch, he was conscious the whole time, much to his devastation.

“Demon Lord, maybe that Dragonborn will kick your butt, too! That’ll be the day!”

“Uh huh...”

He replied with apathy. It was impossible for both of them to exist at the same time, after all.

“Anyway, where are the knights you had with you, Luna?”

“Hmm? I sent them home. I don’t need them anymore.”

“You...”

Someone at the top of a nation’s government going solo... That was something unthinkable by the Demon Lord’s standards. Especially when there was a terror attack and assassination attempt just the day before.

“What are you going to do if there’s another emergency situation?”

“...Y-You’ll be there.”

“Huh? When did I sign up to be your bodyguard?”

“Zip it! I know you’re jumping with joy inside to be with me! You pervert!”

A vein protruded on the Demon Lord’s forehead, but Aku (who was sitting in

between them) laughed.

“It will be so much fun! I’ve always wanted to go on an adventure like this!”

“For real...?”

“See, listen to Aku. Swear your servitude to me, Demon Lord!”

Staring down Luna’s self-righteous finger pointed at his face, the Demon Lord could only sigh.

After some time had passed in silence, the Demon Lord thought of some items to craft.

“Fine, we’ll head to the Holy City together. It doesn’t hurt that you have this carriage... But you have to change into something more inconspicuous.”

“Ch-Change...? You’re trying to get me into something pervy, aren’t you!?”

“You moron. Put this on.”

“What is this...? And where were you keeping it?”

The Demon Lord had produced a blazer. He figured she wouldn’t draw too much attention to herself walking down the street in something like that. He had other options to pull from, like a high school uniform, a maid’s outfit, a china dress, and many more, but he thought taking out any of those would have only given Luna more ammunition to call him a pervert. On the other hand, the Defense of any normal clothes from this world was unsatisfactory. In the end, he reluctantly decided to bite the bullet and spend some of his precious SP.

“A Defense of 10 isn’t too good, but our priority is keeping people from knowing who you are.”

“10...? You know, you say some weird stuff, sometimes.”

Ignoring her, the Demon Lord crafted another item. ...A Sweet Dumpling Skewer. This was a one-shot item that healed the user’s SP by 50. In this world, that classified it as a miracle drug.

“Aku. You must be tired from the ride. I know you don’t have much experience in carriages. Have some of these. They’re sweets from my country.”

“Wow... They’re so cute! Such a sweet scent, too... Thank you, Master Demon

Lord!”

“Th-That looks good... I want one too!”

“There’s half a dozen of them. Knock yourself out. I’m going to smoke outside for a bit. Go ahead and change while I’m out there.”

The Demon Lord stepped out of the carriage to be greeted by a clear sky above him. Gazing up at it, he lit a cigarette with practiced efficiency.

(I better grind some SP somehow...)

His SP was already down to just 50 and some change, which wasn’t a comfortable number. The Demon Lord could blame part of it on him spoiling Aku and Luna, though.

(Just like the game, I gain SP when I fight...)

The first option that came to mind was playing adventurer, the staple of fantasy worlds. In fact, there were adventurers in this world, too. They took on various quests, and some specialized in hunting monsters while others were more like treasure hunters. Since there were always wars going on up north, mercenary work wasn’t an unpopular way of putting food on the table, either.

(I can’t have people seriously pegging me as a Demon Lord. Maybe I should find a day job.) Akira Ono, a working Japanese man at his core, considered this option, too. On the other hand, the prospect of working a nine-to-five in a fantasy world, of all places, wasn’t a pleasant one.

“Miss Holy Maiden, this is so sweet!”

“Ah, stop being so childish, Aku. A proper lady enjoys sweets in modera-Mmmmmm!”

“I even feel like I’m not tired anymore!”

“That pervert... He’s probably trying to get our guards down with food so he can do unspeakable things to us! But these are so good!”

‘It’s like they’re doing a skit,’ the Demon Lord mumbled, hearing the ruckus from the carriage. At the same time, his ultra-keen hearing picked up another commotion: people yelling and swords clashing. He squinted into the distance to see a pair of women being chased by wolf-like creatures.

(You ask and you shall receive...)

The corner of his lip lifted into a smirk. It was an expression truly becoming of a Demon Lord.

To the Holy City

“Ready, Yukikaze?”

The woman said, drawing the sword from her back. It was a giant sword that looked too heavy to lift, even for most men. There were loads of Spell Stones imbedded in the sword, but the wielder had opted to make the sword heavier with them rather than lighter... to bolster its Attack. She wore a large brown robe that covered most of her body, but patches of her skin that showed through the opening in the robe were coffee-brown, befitting of the hot climate. Her hair was short, perhaps to keep it from impeding her movements. All-in-all, she looked athletic. Her hair and eyes were a burning red. Mikan was her name, and while her eyes were piercing, her appearance would be considered attractive by most. In fact, she was one of the most famous adventurers in Holylight.

“...Ready, prime, and dripping.”

A dainty mage who answered to the name Yukikaze gave a reply with dangerous connotations. In accordance to that name, which means ‘wind of snow’ in Japanese, Yukikaze’s hair and eyes were bright white. From in between her black robe and stereotypical witch’s hat, her sleepy eyes were peeking out.

“Just... please take it seriously,” Mikan replied.

“I always take *it* seriously.”

“I’m getting these weird implications every time you say something.”

“It’s all in the ear of the listener. Maybe you’re frustrated.”

Yukikaze’s voice was soft and sleepy, but had a cute, soprano chime to it. Her popularity in Holylight was explosive, making her something like a pop star. This adorable 15-year-old starlet had captured the hearts of most boys and men

around the country. Under her robe, however, was the body of a fifteen-year-old boy.



“There’s supposed to be a pack of Sand Wolves around here...”

“...I’m all sweaty from this heat. Especially in my bosom.”

“You don’t even have a... Gaah, you drive me nuts!”

“Poor, blind, Mikan. Only those with a pure heart can see my shapely breasts.”

Scratching her head, Mikan ignored the comment. This line of conversation was nothing new for them. A Sand Wolf was a decent threat on its own, but their numbers exploded once they formed a pack, making them extremely dangerous. A pack of them could be aggressive enough to charge into a well-protected city, so an unprepared village didn’t stand a chance against a stampede of them. This was why it was critical to take down a pack while it was relatively small. When the pair arrived at the point where the pack had been spotted, their eyes widened. There wasn’t a pack of Sand Wolves there, but an overwhelming horde of them.

“Nope nope nope! We can’t deal with that!”

“...I can’t take that many. There’s only one of me. With only one hole.”

“This isn’t the time!”

Watching the two of them making a ruckus as they ran toward him, the Demon Lord laughed. But then, the color started to drain from his face as he realized how many wolves were chasing the girls.

(What the...!? How many of them are there!?)

A drop of cold sweat trickled down his face (now devoid of a smile) and even the cigarette fell out of his mouth. A sort of primal fear curdled within him. No matter how powerful of a protection he had, the sheer number of the horde evoked a natural dread in the Demon Lord, as it would have in anyone.

(Hundreds of them... Wait, it’s a train!)

A train was a phenomena occasionally seen in MMOs, where players running away from enemies cause a large number of them to chase after them, until even uninvolved players get wrapped up in the mess. No matter the intention, causing a train was a strong taboo according to MMO etiquette.

“You! Run!”

“...It’s up to you, now, Silver Fox. Chao.”

(Screw them! Take some responsibility and get eaten, already!) The Demon Lord nearly screamed this out loud, but somehow held back. If he were to run away, Aku and Luna would have been in danger.

(I-I can do this... I know I can. I just have to try hard enough!) With desperate self-motivation, the Demon Lord hyped himself up.

(I’ve got the shield. This is fine. This is fine. This is fine. This... is... fine, right?) In the game, of course, the shield only ever activated against other humans. With a deep breath, the Demon Lord calmed himself... Then, remembering Hakuto Kunai’s character, he started speaking to perfectly match what the game’s final boss would say in this situation.

“Fools... Why run from a pitiful drove of beasts?”

The Demon Lord said looking at the two girls running away, but he was speaking more to himself. Once he said it out loud, even the smoke he blew gave him courage. Oh, the wonders of the human brain.

“Aku. Luna. Stay in the carriage...”

Standing in the path of the horde, the Demon Lord braced for impact. When the wolf at the front of the horde lunged at him, the Demon Lord clenched his eyes and teeth... but before the fangs of the wolf could reach him, the familiar ping was heard, and the wolf bounced right off of the barrier. A sense of relief slowly spread through the Demon Lord...

(I win...! The first part is over!)

He nearly clenched his fists in victory, but keeping all of that excitement internalized, he only lit a cigarette with a dauntless attitude. Remembering that the girls could have been watching from the carriage, the Demon Lord wanted to look as cool as he could. Alas, the tragic nature of men.

“Once you bare your fangs at me... beast or man, I won’t hold back,” the Demon Lord said, calmly. He decided to start practicing his Skills in combat against these animals. It was the perfect opportunity he was looking for, since

he hadn't really experienced real combat in this world yet.

"Take your last breath in my arms...**First Skill: Charge.**"

His hand moved too fast for the naked eye to follow, and the Demon Lord threw a knife into the horde, slicing through a few dozen wolves. The next instant, his body leapt at lightning speed.

(Holy crap...!)

The world seemed to move in slow-motion, where everything was almost to a standstill, except for the Demon Lord. Now, he was really getting into it.

"Your lowly eyes... have no right to gaze upon me...! **Second Skill: Eye Gouge.**"

In a flash, the Demon Lord's right hand drew a straight, horizontal line in the air, slashing the eyes of every wolf in the vicinity. Shards began to flow from the Demon Lord's left hand: a sand-like substance created by the Empire that impeded the vision of nearby enemies for half a minute. The wolves cried out in confusion before turning their backs to flee. To kick them while they were down, the Demon Lord said: *...Didn't you know?*

"You can't run away from the Demon Lord...**Third Skill: Mad Rush.**"

The knife in the Demon Lord's right hand danced in a flurry, chopping up countless wolves with each wave of the arm. Finally, the Demon Lord forcefully threw the knife into the middle of the horde. A shockwave erupted upon landing, erupting a giant pillar of flame. There had been enough wolves to swarm every inch around him, but now they were engulfed by the flames one after another, immediately turning to ash. In the end, the horde of wolves had gone down from about three hundred to five. The remaining bunch were desperately growling, as if to conceal their terror.

"Mere beasts, after all... That was hardly a chore."

Brazenly smoking his cigarette, the Demon Lord dropped this line. He must have started to enjoy it somewhere along the way, as he was getting into his part. Perhaps he wanted to blow off some steam after the Bosozoku fiasco.

"Have you learned the insignificance of your existence...? Then kindly scram."

On this command, the wolves scrambled away. Now that their numbers were so few, it would take a considerable amount of time until the Sand Wolves would form a full-fledged pack again. While the horde had been successfully dispatched, the pair of adventurers had some thoughts upon witnessing this annihilation.

“That’s... the Demon Lord we’ve been hearing about...!”

Mikan was shaking at the one-sided battle that had just played out in front of her. In truth, that wasn’t so much a battle as it was a massacre. She didn’t understand what happened, but she witnessed the Sand Wolves run into a strange wall before they could even reach this man. Everything about him was outside her realm of knowledge. What’s more, he had just called himself the Demon Lord!

“...The silver fox is foxy... My butt is tingling.”

Yukikaze felt a hot pulse in her rear end after watching the one-sided beat-down. While the Sand Wolves never reached that silver fox due to a mysterious barrier, she was determined to conquer any obstacle for him... Even the obstacle under her robe.

“That thing’s dangerous...!”

“...Very dangerous. My chastity is in danger.”

“We better get to the Holy City and make a report!”

“...I better get to the Holy City and clean myself up.”

While their conversation wasn’t cohesive, that was nothing new.

Meanwhile, Aku, who had been watching from the carriage, said with excitement: “Wow, Master Demon Lord! My heart’s pounding really fast...”

Placing her hands on her heart, Aku blissfully closed her eyes. He had saved her from a life without purpose. He always protected her, without fail. Even if the Demon Lord turned out to be a truly evil person after all, Aku knew that she couldn’t leave him. If it came down to it, she was ready to take on the rest of the world by his side.

“...Did you two behave? Talking to you, Luna.”

The Demon Lord returned to the carriage, leisurely taking a seat. Luna had already changed into the blazer, which added a sense of daintiness to her appearance. She at least looked like a princess now. Perhaps bothered by the skirt that went with the blazer, Luna squealed with a blushing face.

“Th-That wasn’t too bad... Keep protecting me like that.”

“I wasn’t protecting you in particular...”

“A-Anyway, don’t you have something to say!? You know!?”

The Demon Lord sighed internally. He was an adult, after all, albeit by the most basic definition. He was well aware of what to say to a girl who had just changed into a new outfit.

“Looks pretty good on you. Looks really good, actually.”

“D-Duh... A lady like me looks great in anything!”

Luna declared this with glee, puffing her non-existent chest. However, the Demon Lord’s hearing didn’t miss her quietly whispering ‘hee hee... I knew it!’ under her breath. His extremely keen hearing couldn’t have missed a pin drop a mile away. It wasn’t his fate to become the kind of protagonist seen in rom-com animes who remained oblivious to the adorations of girls around him.

† † †

“Aww... All the doggos I collected are gone,” a girl said softly as she watched the carriage leave. She had feline ears on her head, and was even wearing gloves that resembled tiger paws. She was an Anima, something like a beast-human hybrid. A very high-level one, at that.

“Good thing I found something much better than the doggos.”

Her face was even painted up with tiger stripes. In contrast to her dainty face, her physical strength was off the charts. In fact, behind her was a Shield Liger, a monster incomparably more threatening than a mere Sand Wolf, presenting the top of its head to the girl in a sign of obedience. An attack by just one Shield Liger would force Holylight to deploy their Knights’ Order. Even then, there would be countless casualties in the process of taking the creature down.

“Is he really the Demon Lord? That’s the king of the Hellions, right? Why is he

with humans? Why is he with a Holy Maiden?”

In accordance with her younger appearance, she spoke her thoughts out loud. The Animas neighbored Hellion territory, and were engaged in a long-lasting war with them.

“In any case, it’s not going to be fun if he makes it to Hellion territory.”

The girl’s thoughts jumped all over the place. Like her appearance would suggest, thinking didn’t seem to be her forte.

“But... he just might be able to beat them...” the girl said, and jumped on the back of the monster behind her. Without any commands, the creature took off, shrinking into the horizon in an instant.

While the journey seemed long yet short at the same time, the Demon Lord’s party was approaching the Holy City. There was sure to be new encounters and troubles waiting ahead. The Demon Lord, the Evil Princess, the Holy Maiden, the silver Dragonborn — rumors of whom were rapidly spreading — and the Satanists were now in the picture with them. The havoc wreaked by the Demon Lord was about to reach the level of a national catastrophe... But that’s a little ways down the road.

Chapter Three: Trouble in the Holy City

The Demon Lord's Army Emerges

—En route to the Holy City, Holylight

“Hah ha ha! Finally! The time has finally-kfah gfah!”

The Demon Lord had stepped off from the carriage to take a break, but as soon as he opened the Admin screen, he let out an insane cackle. Eventually he had laughed himself into a coughing fit. It looked pretty dumb.

“I knew he was an idiot.”

“M-Master Demon Lord is... just a jokester!”

Aku attempted to salvage the situation, but Luna's glare remained harsh. In fact, it grew more accusatory by the second.

“That look... He's thinking of something perverted.”

“B-Butt...?”

Blushing, Aku covered her rear. Luna was proving herself to be a bad influence on Aku during the past few days of travelling together. Without paying any mind to them, the Demon Lord rambled off: “I have some contemplation to do... Get in the base, just to be safe.”

After saying this with a strangely show-boating attitude, he produced the base he created the previous day, and in a split-second, at that. Materializing a well-constructed building in less than a second... if it were a magic spell, this would have made the Demon Lord one of the best mages in this world.

“Oh, the magic house! I always wanted to see what was inside.”

“Miss Holy Maiden! There's an oil drum bath in there!”

“Oil drum? What's that?”

As they chatted their way into the base, the Demon Lord called to the

coachman. He was strangely attentive from time to time... or perhaps it was just his Japanese nature.

“Please, feel free to join them.”

“I-I wouldn’t dare, sir...! I’ll be feeding the horses right here. Please don’t mind me.”

The coachman shrunk his head into his shoulders. Reflexively, the Demon Lord answered with a polite nod. He was a typical Japanese man, after all.

“Then have one of these, please... It’ll be refreshing.”

The Demon Lord made the coachman hold a Mild Heaven to his mouth and lit the cigarette for him. With all the color drained from his face, the coachman was on the verge of tears, but braced himself and inhaled. He must have thought that he would have been torn to shreds if he had refused. From his perspective, the Demon Lord was an existence that defeated a Holy Maiden and her knights single-handedly, as well as nonchalantly exterminated a sea of Sand Wolves. The coachman saw before him none other than a bona fide Demon Lord.

“M-My... shoulders feel... lighter...”

A coachman’s job involves prolonged use of his hands and shoulders. This coachman had worked for the Holy Church for years, building up exhaustion in his shoulders. Now, all of that melted away with a revitalizing sensation. This was because the Demon Lord’s cigarettes each had the effect to heal 40 Stamina. Considering that the Stamina of a top-tier warrior in this world was around 50, to a normal person, healing 40 Stamina was like getting a brand new body.

“Th-Thank you, sir...”

“It’s important to rest when you can while on the job.”

The coachman could only fake a twitching smile in response. Despite all of his tiredness being swept away, his face only lost more color by the minute. He seemed to be terrified by what the thing in his mouth could possibly be. Was the Demon Lord going to ask for his soul in return? Was there a curse on it that would spell his demise in a few days? The coachman cowered in completely

misplaced fears.

(Alright... That was pretty mature and approachable of me.) The Demon Lord was putting in some wasted effort yet again. He didn't seem to understand how other people perceived him just yet. Even his smile was intimidating, making it difficult for most anyone to feel comfortable in his presence. While Aku and Luna had gotten used to it, it took them some time.

(Now, I really have to make up my mind...)

He finally started thinking about the big question. When he had opened up the Admin screen, an astonishing message had appeared: **Congratulations!**

Your SP is over 1000!

Unlocked: Summon Advisor

Unlocked: Final Judgement

(Finally, it's time...)

Lighting his own cigarette, the Demon Lord squinted into the air.

(That last battle must have netted me all this SP...) For the first time in a while, all of the Demon Lord's mental cogs were turning. He had ended up with 1200 or so SP after taking down the horde of Sand Wolves. It felt like he had just won the lottery.

(Summon Advisor... for 1000 SP, huh?)

The command was incredibly expensive, but he was sure that it would be worth it. The advisors were under Hakuto Kunai's command, and they had been created to protect the Sleepless Castle. Any one of them could take on an army. Both to protect the party and to expand his options, summoning an advisor seemed critically necessary to the Demon Lord.

(Then... the question is who to summon.)

Kunai had commanded an army of two thousand men, all armed with contemporary war gear, but those were faceless mobs in the game... which left him with eight people he could truly call advisors. Four women and four men. Four of them were younger, while the other four were older.

(Think... Who do I need most?)

The Demon Lord contemplated with layers upon layers of forethought. He may not have access to this much SP ever again. It was a once-in-a-lifetime decision. He recalled every last detail he could about the backstories of the advisors he had created.

The first advisor that came to mind was Ren Miyaoji. Bringing to life everything Akira Ono wanted to see as a game designer, she was the best advisor there was. A beautiful and brilliant master of martial arts, born of noble birth, she was a sixteen-year-old girl way too perfect to ever exist in the real world. Amazingly, while her HP was lower, her overall stats exceeded even those of Hakuto Kunai, the final boss of the game. As a functional second final boss of the game, she was the source of many a miserable experience for the players. At the same time, she was the most popular character among them. Despite her status as an enemy character, she had enough charm to be liked by most people who played the game. She would appear as cold as ice on the surface, but had a kind heart. Secretly, she had strong reservations against the Game hosted by the Empire day after day.

(Can't go wrong with Ren...)

Ren was loyal, too. Due to her past, she was in a position to harbor nothing but great gratitude toward Kunai. He didn't have to worry about Ren attacking him out of the blue. From what he could tell by watching Zero from the inside, characters from the game had their own free will, and acted according to it. In other words, they were faithful to their backstory. Summon a dangerous advisor, and the Demon Lord could end up being killed.

The next candidate who came to mind was another one of the younger advisors, Akane Fujisaki. She was the same age as Ren, but Akane was the sun to Ren's calm and collected moon. A less polite way to describe her would be as a thoughtless idiot. She enjoyed anime, comics, and video games, and was an extroverted geek. She would appreciate being summoned to a fantasy world more than anyone else. In combat, she specialized in close-range brawl. For some reason, she wore a china dress and wielded a pair of tonfa, making use of being the fastest among the advisors.

(She's going to put the "C" in crazy around here! I can't take that!) Next, he thought of Yu Kirino, an older member. She was a genius doctor and scientist. According to her chilling backstory, she had performed countless human experimentations to satisfy her sadistic urges and in pursuit of her lifelong goal of uncovering the mysteries of the human body. In the end, she had killed over eight hundred patients, leading her to be sentenced to death by the ethics tribunal. At twenty-two years old, she was an elegant beauty in a lab coat. Recalling her backstory, the Demon Lord felt a shiver go down his spine. He wondered what could happen if she came to life equipped with free will? He wasn't confident that she would continue to serve him without question.

(But Yu could cure any disease or injury.)

While she was a brilliant doctor on her own merit, her Special Ability was almost game-breaking. She could even heal Aku's leg in an instant, the Demon Lord thought. His first-hand experience with various powers from the game, which had now materialized in this world, made him confident of that.

The last female advisor was Shizuka Matoba. She was the same age as Yu, but more insane. After repeatedly committing senseless murders in the capital of the Empire, the Royal Realm, she had earned the moniker of Walking Calamity. According to her backstory, she murdered everyone she came in contact with without exception, bringing down chaos upon the Royal Realm. Born with a fetish for taking apart human bodies, she was a psychopathic serial killer for the history books. Her Attack rivaled that of Ren's, and was a berserker in combat.

(No freaking way! I'm a dead man if I summon her!) Shaking the thought out of his head, he scratched Shizuka off of his mental list of candidates. At the same time, he also scratched off all four male advisors from the list, since all of their powers were too centered around combat. In this world, so far, the Demon Lord had no trouble taking care of combat on his own. He wanted to summon an advisor that could do something that he couldn't.

(...Yu's the one.)

While the Demon Lord didn't expect any illness to befall him, he had to prepare for the worst. Since Yu was also a scientist, he hoped that she could concoct something to combat magic spells, too. The problem was her

dangerous choice of avocation, as well as her razor-sharp intelligence. If he were to let her be, she would go around killing without a second thought, dissecting people to her heart's content, acting only to quench her desires. To boot, she had a particular fetish for younger boys... in truth, the Demon Lord had no idea what would happen after summoning her.

(Dammit... Why did I have to make every one of them a weirdo!?) The Demon Lord cursed his past self. The backstories he had created were now coming back to bite him.

(Gah, just do it already...! At least I can handle Yu if she decides to attack me.) A trio of NPCs that were not under Kunai's command came to the Demon Lord's mind. If they were to show up here, the Demon Lord wasn't confident that even he could handle them. With a sigh of relief, he made sure that none of them were on the list.

"Admin Feature... Summon Advisor."

With his mind made up, the Demon Lord uttered those words.

(I... said it. It's... starting.)

There was no turning back.

"Yu. Come hither to my presence..."



Yu Kirino

“Yu. Come hither to my presence...”

With that call, two pillars of light, one black and one white, appeared in front of the Demon Lord. When the pillars merged into one, a woman appeared, wearing a lab coat. Most would have called her beautiful. Long, straight black hair and an hourglass figure. For many, she had the ideal female appearance.

“At your service, Mister Secretary.”

The Demon Lord felt a sense of nostalgia. Hakuto Kunai’s official title in the Empire had been the Secretary of Citizen Happiness Management. He replied with an attitude becoming of that title, as he slowly, and carefully, gauged his advisor.

“Yes. Thank you for coming...”

“At your command, Mister Secretary, I would go anywhere... Are we in the next arena?”

Looking around at the unfamiliar landscape, Yu looked slightly confused. There was a strange aura of daintiness when the icy woman showed such an expression, but the Demon Lord’s nerves were about to burst.

(She’s talking... All on her own.)

Watching a character he had created moving and talking in front of his very eyes evoked a powerful emotion within the Demon Lord, but he didn’t have the time to watch in awe, at the moment. As he was considering how much to tell her, he realized: (In any case... She is crazy hot...)

Yu had garnered fanatic popularity from the community of masochistic players. Now, the Demon Lord was beginning to understand where they were coming from. It’s worth noting that Yu and Shizuka were extremely popular among female players, too. Strong female characters must have been appealing to women as well as men, he imagined.

“Now, where to start... First of all, we are not in the Empire. Nor in any of the other nations, for that matter...”

Carefully, the Demon Lord formed his words as he observed Yu. He was sure that none of his advisors would have ever thought that the Empire and the world it resided in was all within the digital world of a video game. Certainly, they didn't doubt that they were living on Earth, and in the real world. Obviously, they wouldn't have believed the Demon Lord if he had told them that their world was created by someone... him.

Still carefully choosing his words, the Demon Lord explained what had happened to him so far. Appearing in the Great Forest all of the sudden. Being attacked by a devil-like creature. The fact that a fallen angel seemed to be related to the cause of it all. That they were headed to the Holy City now... No matter how eloquently he chose the words to describe them, these events hardly seemed plausible. But Yu kept a serious expression as she hung on the Demon Lord's every word, going into deep thought here and there.

"It sounds like some sort of forced-transportation attack, but... Yes, the scenery around us does seem different from that of our world."

"Glad you're catching on quickly. As for our objectives moving forward..."

He explained his intentions to look into the Ember Angel, and that his powers will be unlocked as he collects more SP. After hearing all of this, Yu contemplated for a moment with her hand on her chin, but soon gave her assessment.

"No matter how we ended up here, Mister Secretary, I believe that the Sleepless Castle will be a necessity..."

"...Hm."

He gave a vague answer, but in truth, the Demon Lord didn't think it was necessary all that much. They could easily live in the base already, or stay at inns when in towns. Building a giant, contemporary fortress in this fantasy world would undoubtedly lead to people calling it the Demon Lord's Castle. He was thinking about building it earlier, but had thought better of it since.

(That's just setting up for some hero to come and kill me...) Of course, he had no intention of letting said hero kill him, even in such a case. He had already taken care of a Holy Maiden with a fierce spanking session, after all. Even if someone like the Hero of So and So, or So and So of the Light had challenged

him, he could only imagine that the end-result would be the same as when Luna had attacked him.

“How fateful that we ended up here, Mister Secretary.”

“Yes... I think it was very fateful, too.”

“...I’m glad you agree, sir.”

As Yu showed him a bewitching smile, the Demon Lord’s heart skipped a beat.

(This chick is a silver fox hunter!)

Considering that she was also popular among other women, ‘femme fatale’ might have been more accurate.

“Now it’s clear what we must do in this strange land, sir.”

“We have a long road ahead of us. Let’s take it one step at a time.”

The Demon Lord responded to her with the same gravitas, only because he had no idea what she was talking about. He had implied that he wanted her to take the first step of explaining what she meant to him, but Yu’s smile only grew wider.

“Mister Secretary, you haven’t changed... You find the joy in every situation.”

“...Life is too short not to, don’t you think?”

If the Demon Lord were to consider this a vacation, it couldn’t get any better. All the details he spent fifteen years creating in the game were coming to life in front of his very eyes. This was a dream come true, in a way.

“Then, Mister Secretary. What shall be our first course of action?”

“First, I plan to grow the Base and build a Field Hospital.”

“...! You always find a way to make my dreams come true, sir.”

“But of course... The dreams of my dear subjects are my dreams, too.”

At this point, the Demon Lord was self-aware of how much smoke he was blowing. Still, now that he had summoned Yu, the natural course of action was to build a hospital. While he was at it, he was scheming to overturn the terrible rumors going around that he was the Demon Lord.

(If we offer medical treatment for dirt-cheap, those rumors will be gone in no time...) Medical technology was mostly undeveloped in this world, and only a limited few could wield healing magic. If he ran it well, the hospital could even earn him a fortune.

“It goes without saying, but no killing. First, we have to learn.”

He didn't forget to make that clear to Yu. There was so much he had to learn: about the last of the three angels, the Ember Angel; how this society worked; about magic, adventurers, monsters, and devils... If rumors were to arise that his hospital was of the murdering variety, the whole plan would be ruined.

“Yes. It all begins with learning... Learning is what's most important.”

Seeing Yu's wholehearted agreement, the Demon Lord was relieved. At the very least, he didn't sense any insubordinate intentions from her, and it seemed like she would obey his orders. If he could expect this from all of his advisors, the Demon Lord would have tried to summon them all as swiftly as he could. More advisors meant more options in this world, which would allow him to gather more information.

“Then, I will tell you everything I've discovered so far.”

He shared with Yu the various things he knew about the strange world they were in. Her mind seemed to be as intelligent as he had imagined, as she processed everything he threw at her like a sponge soaking up water. The Demon Lord's stomach sunk at seeing her intelligence on display, though.

(There's no doubt she's smarter than me. I don't know jack about science or medicine... No matter what, I can't drop the ruse.) If Yu were to find out that he wasn't Hakuto Kunai... The Demon Lord couldn't predict what would happen to him. The blood drained from his face as he imagined the bloody conclusion of being stabbed to pieces, and Yu walking away with his head in a bag.

“Then, Yu. I'll introduce you to our companions... Play nice.”

“Yes, Mister Secretary.”

“One last thing. As far as they know, we are from a distant nation in this world. Keep that in mind.”

“Understood, sir.”

And so, the Demon Lord introduced Yu to the girls. Of course, a cacophony ensued. Who could have blamed them? A whole person appeared out of nowhere. If that wasn't magical, what was?

“Sh-She's so beautiful...!”

Aku shouted...

“Is-Is she your lover? Where did she come from!?”

And Luna yelled over her.

“I summoned an advisor of mine... I hope you will all get along.”

† † †

(How intriguing...)

As the secretary was explaining things to her, Yu was jumping with joy on the inside. They had held immense power before, but only within the confines of the arena. Once outside of the arena, the rule of the Empire was caught up in a storm of political strife. In fact, they had been standing on extremely thin ice in that regard.

(Here, there is no one above us... to stop us from controlling things as we please.) Back in her world, a single mistake could have cost them the lives of everyone on the team. It wasn't unusual for all of one's allies to turn on them overnight. Yu didn't much care what world she was in now. Now that she was released from the Empire, which had been her entire world up until this point... Yu considered herself finally alive.

(Besides, there are people completely different from us in this world. Not to mention magic...!) She had to know. She had to know it all. The entirety of this world's humanity. Their flesh, skin, organs, brain, heart, cells, DNA. She had to gather all the information there was, and solve the mystery. Honestly, she wanted to start on that as soon as she could, but she controlled her beating heart as she steadied her breathing.

(You are as astounding as always, Mister Secretary...)

Despite the outlandish situation they were in, he seemed to be taking it in

stride, even enjoying himself. He had even said that their transportation to this world was 'fateful.' She completely agreed. It was as if someone was telling the two of them to create an empire of their own... Their own nation severed from the constricting higher-ups of the Empire. It was sure to be a utopia, she thought, both for her and for the secretary. While she felt like she was overstepping some boundaries in thinking so, she considered the secretary both her boss and her comrade. While she had only been able to kill about eight hundred, the secretary was born a Demon Lord, standing in the blood of over four million. If she were able to assist him by his side... She trembled to think of just how many... Now, she didn't think she could keep in her laughter any longer. As loud as she could, she wanted to shout out to the world: 'We are liberated!'...

Yu Kirino

Race: Human — Age: 22

Weapon Hand Grenade

Explosion damage to a wide area. Thanks to her skill, Yu can wield this weapon with catastrophic results. Infinite uses.

Armor Doctor's Lab Coat

The fabric looks thin, but is immensely effective. As a bonus, it protects the wearer from all status conditions. Infinite durability.

Level: 1 — HP: 6000/6000 — Stamina: 600/600 — Attack: 40 (+50) — Defense: 40 (+25) — Dexterity: 40 — Magic: 0 — Magic Defense: 0 (+20)

Equipped Skills: First: **Explosive Expertise** Second: **To Pieces** Third: **Chain Explosions** Combat Skills: **Lock-On, Instinct, Psychopath, Hunter, Ruthless, Iron Maiden, Strategist, Avenger, Limit Breaker, Break Through** Survival Skills: **Propaganda, Recover, Sadist, Charm, Duality, Genius, Academic, Medicine, Causality, Censorship** Special Abilities: **Hands of God, etc.**

The Hands of God

As soon as introductions were concluded in the Base, Aku's treatment began. The Demon Lord watched the treatment, breathless. This was something he couldn't predict the outcome of.

(No... Stay strong. What am I doing if I can't even believe in a character I created?) "All right, Aku... Try to relax."

"O-Okay..."

As they watched, the fingers on Yu's right hand morphed into a syringe, surgical knife, *etc.* This was Hands of God, one of her Special Abilities. The Demon Lord had witnessed it in-game countless times, but seeing it for real was pretty grotesque. This ability, though, came with the game-breaking power of 'eliminating any and all illnesses and healing any and all injuries.'

"U-Um... Y-Your hand..."

As expected, Aku was scared by the horrifying transformation of Yu's hand. But then, Yu's backstory as a genius physician seemed to kick in, as she wore a gentle smile and spoke out to relax her patient.

(Thanks, past me... for thinking about these details.) "It's all right, little Aku... Just the tip. It's just going to be the tip."

"Erm... Why are you breathing so heavy!? You're scaring me!"

(Hold it! What the hell is she saying!?)

Yu's perilous choice of words knocked the Demon Lord off of his feet. While Aku did look androgynous, she was, of course, completely female. Not one of the prepubescent boys she fetishized.

"Aku, do you want to try on some boys' clothes after this? Let's play doctor together."

"N-No thank you... please...!"

Seeing that the conversation wasn't going to drop the dangerous undertones on its own, the Demon Lord rushed to interject: "There's no time for musings,

Yu...”

“My apologies, sir.”

Yu’s mouth was the one recklessly running loose, but her fetish was conjured up by the Demon Lord in the first place. He was the one to blame, here.

“Then, Mister Secretary, I’ll begin...”

“Thank you.”

Yu’s fingers, now morphed into various instruments, came in contact with Aku’s foot. They moved to and fro as if they were examining it, before a liquid filled the syringe-like appendage, which then inserted itself into Aku. Yu was able to generate various medicines in her body, and inject them into her patients. The same went for poison, as well. This procedure cost her some Stamina, but all of the Demon Lord’s advisors had ridiculous amounts of Stamina to begin with. These procedures wouldn’t drain enough Stamina from Yu to affect her in any way.

“H-Hey... Demon Lord! Are you sure she’ll be okay!?”

“Don’t sweat it. Trust me. And my loyal subject.”

“I-I’ve never once trusted you before...!”

While the Demon Lord had replied with confidence to Luna, he was sweating bullets inside. Yu’s fingers morphed from one medical-equipment-like object to another, and with each touch, Aku’s right foot regained color. Even parts that hadn’t been getting any blood before were now glowing in a healthy pink color.

(Come on, Yu...)

“All right, that’s it. I’ll clean up the scar, too. You’re a girl, after all.”

(...Wait, she’s done already!?)

Yu’s fingers morphed into some kind of brush. Aku’s scar became more and more faded with every stroke of that brush. It was a surreal sight, to say the least. Keeping his frantic mind under control, the Demon Lord acted as if this was an everyday occurrence.

“Hm... All finished?”

“Yes, Mister Secretary. No complications.”

“Aku, can you stand? I’m sure you’ll have to ease into walking over time.”

“I-I’ll try!”

Aku rushed to her feet, and took a few steps, timidly. While her steps were still a little heavy, there was no limp.

“I-I can walk...! My foot...!”

“Excellent. Why don’t we take a little stroll outside?”

The Demon Lord suggested.

“U-Um! Thank you, Lady Yu...! I-I don’t know what to... I, uh...!”

“Don’t worry. Give your thanks to the secretary.”

Yu responded with an alluring smile, as Aku kept thanking her.

(Still, she should get some steps in, outside...)

The Demon Lord thought, but it wasn’t like he had any knowledge about physical rehabilitation. It was just that the only thing he could do was hold her hand and walk with her.

“We’ll step out for a moment. Stay inside.”

Taking Aku’s hand, the Demon Lord led her out of the base. Outside, the sun was glaring down as always, but a clear sky seemed fitting for a joyous day such as this one...

“M-Master Demon Lord! I can really walk... It’s incredible!”

“Remember... the word impossible is not in the Empire’s dictionary.”

Perfectly concealing his internal freak-out during the procedure, the Demon Lord maintained his bravado. While he still looked like a force to be reckoned with on the outside, he was getting pretty tired of playing the part. Raising his hands into the air, the Demon Lord did a big stretch under the clear, blue sky.

(I can’t relax in front of that advisor of mine just yet, but I’m sure it won’t hurt to break character a little when I’m alone with Aku.) Acutely sensing the Demon Lord’s demeanor soften, Aku chimed in, cheerfully.

“I must be dreaming... I can walk. Like everyone else.”

“You’re not dreaming. You can walk and live like anyone else.”

“M-Master Demon Lord... Will you pinch my cheek?”

“What a cliché...”

The Demon Lord stopped short of laughing it off, as he saw drops of tears falling from Aku’s eyes.

“Um, well... You know. I’m happy for you.”

If he could have sucked back in this stupid response, he would have. In fact, he wanted to pinch his own mouth shut if it couldn’t come up with a half-decent sentence when it mattered, after blowing out smoke 24/7.

“...Master Demon Lord. May we keep walking for a while longer?”

Aku said, as she took the Demon Lord’s hand. It didn’t look much like a typical afternoon stroll, but he definitely didn’t dislike walking around in this fantasy world. The dried-up earth was cracked every so often, and the sun was scorching down on them, but somehow, it seemed like his life was worth living more here and now than it did in the real world when he left it.

(Maybe it’s because she’s here...)

At first, the Demon Lord had lamented how he ended up in this world. But now, he was beginning to consider the trip worth it, even if it was just to treat Aku’s foot.

“I guess you won’t have to carry me on your back anymore, Master Demon Lord...”

“I’ll still carry you if you get tired.”

Seeing Aku’s strangely matured expression, the Demon Lord lit a cigarette as if to flee the scene. Generally speaking, no matter the country or world, girls grew up faster than boys. Often, while boys are playing in the mud, girls are thinking about things years ahead of their male classmates. Unfortunately, as the Demon Lord was a bachelor, he wasn’t adept at picking up on these pre-teenage intricacies. As he exhaled smoke without saying a word, the grip on his hand tightened.

“Master Demon Lord. Please, never leave me.”

“...Save that kind of line for when you grow up and fall in love.”

To never leave... making that promise meant that he would live out the rest of his days in this world, leaving behind the real world with everything in it. The Demon Lord couldn't promise that right now. He didn't want to make any false promises when he was about to head to the Holy City to research the Ember Angel in search of a way back home.

“But I already know...”

Aku insisted.

“Come on...”

The Demon Lord laughed. Aku was a thirteen-year-old child, after all. Back in his schooldays, there were a few kids that wanted to act mature and were infatuated with their teacher. He pegged that this might have been something like that.

“Now, let's start heading back.”

In the end, their hands remained held until they returned to the base.

† † †

“The secretary sure cares a lot about that girl...”

Yu found herself speaking her thoughts out loud. The secretary had, when an individual had met a certain condition, showered them with generosity unthinkable from his usual demeanor. That happened when an individual was crowned victor of the Game. Yu also had that sense of respect for the victor, naturally. But that girl... did not survive a Game.

(Perhaps she has some special powers...)

The secretary had exceptional skills for discovering talent. All eight of the advisors who protected the Sleepless Castle were scouted out by him, even though some of them were still young enough to be considered children.

(I want to know... all about the people of this world.) Truth be told, she wanted to explore the girl further and further, but she controlled herself from

disrespecting the companions of the secretary. Besides, once a hospital was built... she would have all the subjects she could want for.

“I can’t believe you healed her foot... I guess the Demon Lord’s whole fleet has ridiculous powers.”

The girl who was introduced to Yu as Luna mumbled this next to her. To Yu, magic seemed like a power much more ridiculous than hers. The grass was always greener on the other side, she supposed.

“But you have my thanks, too. Not him, never. But I’ll give you my gratitude.”

Yu let out a smile hearing this. Luna’s innocence and fearless attitude reminded her of Akane a little.

“I see why the secretary has taken a liking to you...”

“H-Huh!? Th-That’s just annoying! Just, so annoying!”

How she stubbornly denied her feelings was just like Akane, too. Then, Yu took notice of Luna’s face. Pretty cute, she thought. She imagined Luna in boy’s clothes. Cutting her hair and putting her in shorts could do the trick.

“W-We’re back!”

“How is your foot, Aku? The Demon Pervert Lord didn’t try anything, did he?”

“You never change, do you...? I’m impressed, somehow,” the secretary said and approached Yu. Then, his hand touched her shoulder... with a pat.

“Yu, that treatment was amazing... I’m glad I summoned you.”

His words electrified her palms and sent a strange tremor and elation from the top of her head to the tips of her toes.

(What... is this...!?)

She felt so much joy that it almost brought her to tears. Her body, her soul, down to every last one of the cells in her body and every last strand of hair on her head were quaking in jubilation... She didn’t understand why, but an overwhelming sense of euphoria enveloped her, as if an omnipotent creator had just validated her existence.

“S-Sir... I am glad that... I could be of use to you...”

Her breathing was heavier. Yu no longer understood her own body... This wasn't the first time the secretary had complimented her on her work, but never before had she felt this sensation. What was different now...?

"I'll need your assistance moving forward. I'm counting on you."

"Y-Yes, sir...!"

(Mrr... I can barely talk...!)

Now, Yu even noticed her heart pounding louder in her chest. This was definitely weird. Why did receiving his compliments and trust make her so happy...? To her dismay, tears formed at her eyes and blurred the world in front of her. If this was what happiness truly felt like, any sense of joy she had felt in her life so far were utterly meaningless in comparison.

(Something's... different. He's not the secretary I know... somehow.) "Now that Aku's foot has been treated... Let's say we have a feast once we reach the Holy City," the Demon Lord proposed.

"Yeah! But this time, you're buying, Demon Lord!"

"I-I'll be happy with the crackers..."

"No, Aku. Luna, take us to the best restaurant in the city when we get there."

"Sure... But you do have money, right...?"

As she listened to the other three talk, Yu decided to hold off on pursuing her thoughts any further. Her shoulder, where he had touched her, was still radiating heat. She doubted she could think straight at all, at the moment.

(First, the hospital. I wonder if the secretary will praise me like that again...)

Aku gained the Survival Skill: Damsel

Survival Skill — Damsel

A rare skill that existed in the game. While the chance to gain it was extremely low at 3%, Kunai would negate any attack made against the skill holder. In fact, there were times in the Game where all of the powerful attacks against the Damsel player were negated, allowing that player to turn the entire battle around. To a player with the Damsel skill, Kunai was their messiah. For their opponents, however, Kunai was like Satan incarnate.

Adventurers

—Somewhere in Holylight

The hall was enormous, almost too big to be underground. This was in the headquarters of the Satanists, where the higher-ups of the organization gathered. Now, they were discussing their attack that took place a few days ago.

“Warlkin. How is it that you failed so miserably even after deploying Tartarus?”

“You may be a half-decent commander, but a coward will always be a coward.”

Most of the discussion involved insults against Warlkin. However, he didn’t refute any of it, and remained silent. He was sure that if any one of them in this hall were in his place, they would have been defeated just as easily.

“That Dragonborn had incredible powers. There’s nothing more to it.”

He spat out, causing the commotion to grow around him. But when the figure sitting in the chair at the far end of the room raised their hand... the room fell silent. Utopia, leader of the Satanists, finally spoke.

“I care less about the Dragonborn, and more about the rumor that the Demon Lord has appeared.”

No one could provide any answers. They had prayed for the summoning of the Demon Lord, but not a single one of them had returned from the Shrine of Wishes. It was fair to assume that the summoning had ended in failure. In the Holy City, there was already a wanted sign being posted for someone claiming to be the Demon Lord. However, the man in the drawing just looked like an ordinary human. While his face was intimidating, it didn’t resemble that of a Hellion.

“There was also a rumor... that the King of Devils was resurrected, but was killed by the Demon Lord, wasn’t there?”

Utopia continued, making everyone in the room look like they’ve bitten a sour

lemon. It seemed so futile that their long-awaited Demon Lord had killed the King of Devils. While even the resurrection of the King of Devils was only a rumor to them, this scenario wasn't a pleasant hypothetical to consider.

"In any case, Tartarus requires further sacrifice to grow its power."

This was a command to rain down more chaos and carnage. Everyone in the room strengthened their resolve. They considered the ailment upon their nation too advanced to cure. To them, the only course of action was to burn the whole country to the ground and rebuild it from the ashes.

"...Let us desolate the Holy City, and sink it, and everyone in it, into Tartarus."

Utopia issued a proclamation for desecration. The other higher-ups rushed to their feet, and left the room to prepare for their next attack. Soon, Utopia was left alone.

"Greole, that fool... What pebble did he trip and fall on?" Utopia mumbled into the empty room.

—Kanpai, a bar in the Holy City

This was the bar with the most adventurers hanging around inside at any given time. Regardless of their skill level, adventurers usually came back to the same bar they had been coming to since their start. Many would grow an attachment to the establishment that helped them through their novice days. This bar had seen the rise of many an adventurer, and a lot of successful ones kept coming back. What once started as a small hole-in-the-wall had now become the largest and best known bar in the Holy City: a rare case of a successful business where the customers and establishment grew together.

"The Demon Lord. That was the Demon Lord, no doubt about it!"

Mikan had been rambling on to the woman behind the bar, the owner of the establishment. She was holding a cold glass of ale in her hand, and she seemed pretty drunk already. From the looks of it, she couldn't get the Demon Lord, whom she had met the other day, out of her mind.

"The Demon Lord, huh...? Is he hot?"

The owner asked, boisterously. Her name was Sammie, a portly momma-bear in her fifties. She took good care of everyone in her bar, garnering the respect of many adventurers.

“...He was grey and foxy. I want him to fill the void in my heart. And my butt.”

“Hah ha ha! You got a one-track mind, Yukikaze! Just grab him by the balls, you’ll get any man you want!”

Yukikaze joined in with a precarious line as always, and Sammie cut right back with a hearty laugh. They were both sober, by the way. One would shudder to imagine their line of conversation if they had been drunk. Mikan, the most level-headed of the three, finally shouted with a beet-red face: “Yukikaze, he’s the Demon Lord! Don’t you get it!? Besides, you’re a dude!”

“...You know nothing, Mikan. Anyone can get pregnant if they’re a girl at heart.”

“Is your milk spiked!?”

The men around the bar were listening to this conversation, grumbling. How could they have stayed calm upon hearing that someone had stolen the heart of their idol.

“I don’t know who you are... but I will find you.”

“Demon Lord, my ass! That guy’s got some illusion of grandeur.”

“Actually, I want to be impregnated by Yukikaze. Uwu.”

“Shut your trap!”

These men had formed a brotherhood outside of their respective teams as the Yukikaze Fan Club. They had created various merchandise, and had even published a few fan fics. Some of them even donned a ‘waifu cape’, with a life-size image of Yukikaze on it. Fandoms acted mostly the same in this world, it seemed.

“Think about it. There were like three hundred Sand Wolves... He burned them to the ground in the blink of an eye! That thing is a disaster waiting to happen!”

“...Mikan. He did save your life, remember?”

“Urgh... Y-Yeah, but...”

“...You should repay your life-debt to him in the bed.”

“No, thank you! That’s all you!”

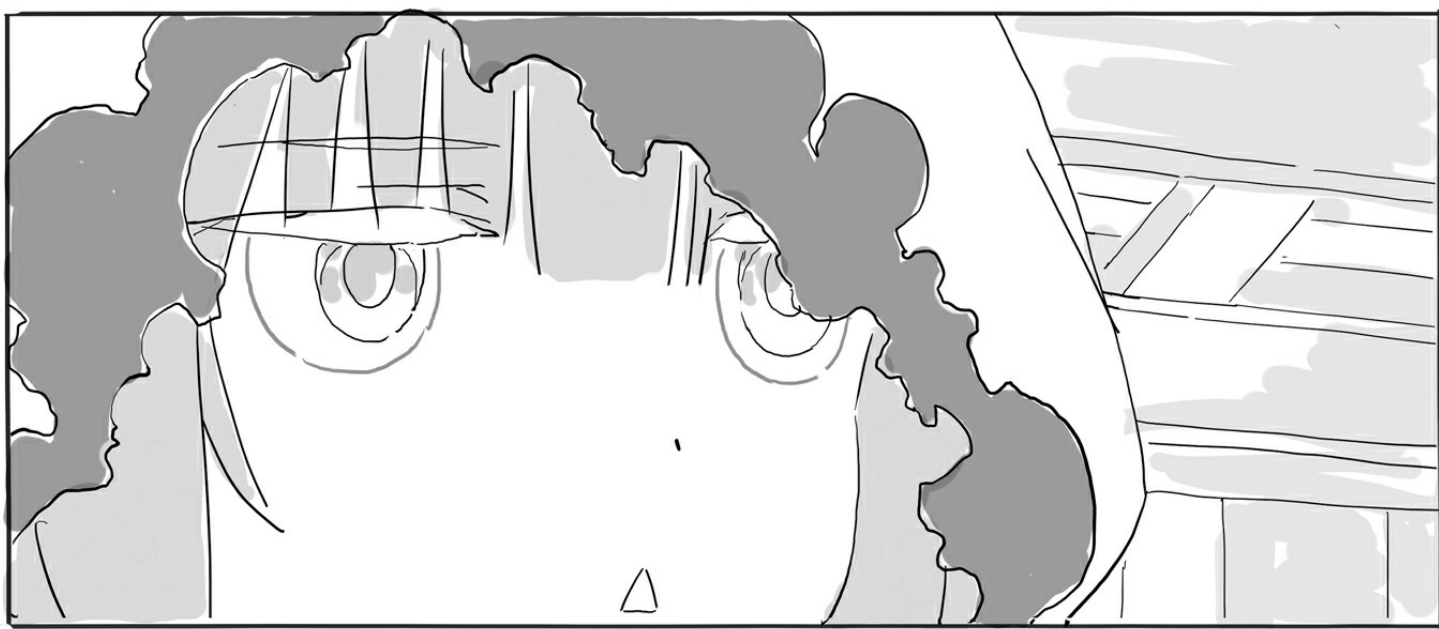
The commotion carried on in Kanpai as it always did. Amidst the ruckus, there was a man with his sword in his lap who spoke to no one. He just kept emptying bottles of strong wine. Known as Alverd the Flashing Sword, he was a famous swordsman who would cut down any opponent with a single cut of his sword.

“Hah! The man who calls himself the Demon Lord... Sounds like as good a stepping block as any.”

Imagining himself cutting down the rumored figure, and the fame and fortune that were sure to follow, Alverd wore a dauntless grin.

—Artemis, a bar in the Holy City.

In contrast to an adventurers’ bar, this bar was a super uppity joint, frequented by nobles. The establishment was filled with tranquility, far from any commotion. In a corner of the bar, a couple of women were quietly enjoying their meal. While these two adventurers stood out among an establishment full of nobles, no one complained. They were both famously world-class adventurers with an S ranking, known as Star Players.



The topic of their conversation wasn't the Demon Lord, but the Dragonborn.

"Olgan, do you really think he's a Dragonborn?"

One of them said, scooping a spoonful of stew into her mouth. She appeared to be a devout priestess, her clothes overflowing with a holy force. A lower-ranking devil wouldn't even be able to approach her. Her most note-worthy feature, however, were her breasts. They looked as if they were about to burst at any instant. One might have wondered how she could breathe at all. Her name was Mynk, one of the best known Star Players. Best known to men for her gorgeous blue hair and mountainous bosom.

"I'd say 'not a chance'... but nothing's ever impossible."

The woman called Olgan replied, eating her salad. She simply shoveled the undressed greens into her mouth. Olgan was almost childlike in stature, the entirety of which was covered with a black robe, keeping anyone around her from seeing much of her. Still, the way she stuffed her small cheeks full of salad was rather adorable. She was of a very rare breed, a mixed blood of human and Hellion... a Firebrand. Some countries hunted them, which was why they concealed her identity and travelled from one base of operations to the next. Naturally, Holylight didn't tolerate her kind. They had only stopped by on their way to their next destination. By this time, Mynk was the only other one who knew that Olgan was a Firebrand. Anyone else who found out... didn't live to spread that knowledge.

"Isn't that exciting, though? A Dragonborn who tolerates no evil."

"If he were real, Animanía wouldn't leave him be."

"A feral Dragonborn, then?"

"Ridiculous. While I'd love to see such a creature..."

While they were both mixed-blood, Dragonborns were revered while Firebrands were persecuted. Of course, it all seemed illogical to Olgan, and she even considered the Dragonborns a thorn in her side.

"Rumor has it, the Demon Lord has appeared, too. The darkness within me proclaims it."

“You’re a priestess, remember...? What’s this nonsense about ‘darkness’?”

“My right eye quakes... There’s no mistake. The Demon Lord has arrived to descend the world into chaos. We will be the darkness to defeat him.”

“What in the world are you talking about?”

Unfortunately, Mynk was in that ‘troubled anime protagonist’ phase. Perhaps this world had a law that one half of a duo had to be a weirdo.

With the speculations of these adventurers unbeknownst to him, the Demon Lord was approaching the Holy City. At the same time, the Satanists were hastening their plan underground. The storm headed for the Holy City now seemed unavoidable.

Ruthless Invasion

(Looks like we’re getting close to a city...)

Gazing over the landscape around them, the Demon Lord observed. As they approached the Holy City, he noticed less dried-up land and more lush greenery. At the same time, the road was widening, and they had passed other carriages here and there. There were more people walking along the street as they progressed, and the villages they passed along the highway were reasonably bustling.

...Except for one particular village. A tall fence surrounded the entire village, but there was hardly anyone to be seen in it. It exuded a strange aura, almost as if it had been abandoned. Since the village was bigger than most, its desolation was even more glaring.

“Luna, what’s with that village? It looks kind of depressing.”

“...That’s my village.”

“...Huh?”

“That’s my land, okay!?”

The Demon Lord mulled over Luna’s answer for a moment. He had imagined Holy Maidens to be of very high status. He never would have pegged one of

them to rule over such a bleak village.

“It’s pretty bleak. Doesn’t it bother you?”

“I’m not interested in ruling any land. Besides, someone from the Church is managing things there. There’s nothing for me to do.”

True, that seemed like an impossible task for Luna. All of her talents relied in magic, leaving her clueless when it came to ruling a land.

(I guess she’d just tax them like nuts and earn herself a revolution. I can already picture her ass being spanked on a cross.) As far as the Demon Lord could tell, while Luna excelled in magic, she was the face of the nation rather than the brain. While she was paraded around with fanfare, he presumed that Luna was diligently separated from profitable land. As Luna herself didn’t seem to have any interest in that sort of thing, she seemed like the perfect figurehead. The Demon Lord set up a Communication call with Yu to discuss the matter.

That’s my impression. What do you think?

I agree, sir. Most likely, nobles and the higher-ups of the Church have left her with a troublesome territory.

Hm. In that case... There won’t be any complaints against us if we were to use this abandoned piece of land, will there?

This village, sir?

Technically speaking, a Holy Maiden rules it, after all. I don’t expect much intervention. That should work in our favor.

The Demon Lord gave this justification, but the number one reason for his decision was his lack of funds. While it seemed like a gold medallion was worth a considerable amount, he didn’t expect it to be able to buy a plot of land with it. In fact, as it was the capital of Holylight, land in the Holy City was extremely expensive.

“Luna, I want to borrow a plot of land in this village.”

“What?”

As the Demon Lord walked into the village, he noticed that the villagers looked peculiar, like they had rabbit ears on their heads. At first, he thought that they were wearing a costume, but Luna informed him that they were a species known as the Bunnies.

“They’re literally rabbit-people...”

“They say that the Bunnies were adored by the Wise Angel back in the day. So, there aren’t many of them, but they all live here.”

“Adore, huh...? More like segregate, by the looks of it.”

“Holylight... isn’t too kind to non-humans.”

The Demon Lord noticed a hint of sorrow on Luna’s expression, but decided that he didn’t have time to dive into it, and looked around the village.

(Building a hospital and treating a lot of patients in a Holy Maiden’s village would definitely clear my name...) He couldn’t have expected much better than ‘a Holy Maiden’s village’ as the title for his base of operations.

“Master Demon Lord, what are we going to do here?”

Aku asked, walking towards the Demon Lord with ease. Watching her walk brought a sensation of indescribable joy to the Demon Lord. Aku could now walk on her own feet. He almost felt like Daddy-Long-Legs.

“We’re going to give this village a doctor.”

“Oh, Lady Yu! People would come from all around the country to be seen by her!”

The Demon Lord nodded in agreement. In other words, people would pay money to be seen by her. He even contemplated if he should build a Hot Springs Resort next to the hospital while he was at it. Even in modern-day Japan, the majority of people requiring medical assistance were elderly, and the elderly liked their hot springs. From what Aku and Luna had told him, bathing (whether in cold or hot water) seemed to be a luxury here. The resort was sure to be a hit.

“How about this plot of land here, Mister Secretary?”

“A little cramped. I’m thinking of building a hot springs resort next to it.”

“Hot springs? How wonderful...”

Seeing Yu’s face loosen into a smile, the Demon Lord was reminded that women also loved their hot springs. In fact, he had never met a woman who didn’t.

(I better go for the dual-income from the hospital and the hot springs. If I sold bars of soap, they’d fly off the shelves, too. Both Luna’s and my reputation will recover, and people will be healthy and happy. It’s a flawless plan with no downsides.) As the Demon Lord schemed away, a man came running through the village.

“M-Miss Luna... What a wonderful surprise. And who may these... !? H-He’s the man on the wanted poster...!”

“Yep. The Demon Lord. He’s working with me now.”

Luna declared, puffing her flat chest. ‘Working with’ was the best choice of words they came up with. She had told the Demon Lord that his face was already known through the Holy City and its surroundings via wanted posters, so they had to justify his presence here. Not that there was any bounty on him, though. The posters simply warned of a suspicious man claiming to be the Demon Lord.

(I gotta turn these rumors around...)

The Demon Lord renewed his resolve. Being treated like a criminal or a wanted man, and in a fantasy world of all places, wasn’t his idea of a fun time. Ideally, he wanted to be a tycoon, running hot springs resorts and hospitals. If he kept to doing mostly good deeds, his social standing would improve along with his finances. This was his master plan.

(Seems easier said than done, now that I think about it. But I do have the ability to build those hospitals and resorts.) One step at a time, he planned to earn the people’s trust. Eventually, he might even become someone adored by the public. A Field Hospital was a Base that hastened HP recovery of those inside it, and a Hot Springs Resort hastened Stamina recovery. Each of them were sure to be a one-of-a-kind establishment in this world.

In order to procure the land to build those establishments upon, the Demon

Lord started negotiating with the Church's representative at the village. If possible, he planned to kick anyone from the Church out of this village. Luna aside, he couldn't imagine the Holy Church being of any help to him. Even in modern-day, any idea with a projectable profit would have been swarmed with vultures asking for a cut.

"You're the one the Church sent? Moving forward, Luna and I will take care of this village. Go back to your cathedral, or wherever, and tell them the news."

He came out swinging hard, from the highest horse he could present himself on.

"Wha...? I-I'll have to speak with those above me, to..."

"Above, huh...? That doesn't sound right, does it?"

The Demon Lord, with an audacious grin, piled on:

"Luna, the rightful lady of the land, is willing to rule the village herself. Are you saying that you or some faceless higher-up of the Church is the rightful ruler of this village?"

With the same breath, he palmed the man's head, pushing it down into his neck.

"N-No! I wouldn't... This village belongs to Miss Luna..."

"Hm. It seems you've answered the question. Now act on your word."

The man scrambled to his house and jumped on his horse before running out of... rather, running *away* from the village. Secretly, the Demon Lord was offended in thinking that his face was as terrifying as the man's reaction indicated. But, he decided to focus on the bright side of getting rid of him. Without his interference, the Demon Lord expected to put his plan in motion as he pleased. Luna, who had been watching the ordeal, mumbled with exasperation.

"You're weirdly quick on your feet when it comes to these things."

"Don't sweat it. Leave it to me and this village will see its golden age."

"Um... Will I get more allowance?"

“Of course. I guarantee it.”

The Demon Lord made sure to wave that carrot in front of Luna’s face. He assumed that, if a homeless nobody like him were to take on these projects, he would face various interference and sabotages. Luna’s cooperation was crucial. He counted on the government not easily eliminating a village run by their face.

“Now, I would like to speak with the people... or the Bunnies, of this village.”

“Sure... But don’t you dare build some weird stuff around here.”

As a response, the Demon Lord just gave Luna a quick spank on her butt. A sharp clap reverberated through the air.

“Hwa! Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What do you think you’re doing!?”

“Hm. Nothing special. Just a celebratory gesture, really.”

“You pervert...! You’ve wanted to touch my shapely butt this whole time, haven’t you!? Admit it! Say it!”

“In your dr-Ow! Let go of my hair, you idiot!”

The village of Rabbi... where Bunnies lived in impoverished harmony. With the Demon Lord’s arrival, however, the destiny of the village had forever changed.

Merciless Invasion

—The village of Rabbi, Holylight

The Bunnies were out in the fields, harvesting carrots. They couldn’t harvest too many from the rugged land, but there were almost no other farmers on the continent that could grow carrots, giving the Bunnies a monopoly on them. Their race-specific skills helped them cultivate and grow this particular crop. Although, with the lack of rain during the past few years, even the Bunnies were unable to cultivate a successful yield.

“Kyon, how are the carrots over there?”

“No good... They’re too thin for us to put a good price on them. How about yours, Momo?”

“It’s not looking too hot. We’ll have to buy some more Water Spell Stones.”

“They’re getting more expensive, lately... The Earth Spell Stones, too.”

Holding the undergrown carrots in their hands, the two Bunnies sighed in dismay. Carrots were an expensive commodity in this country. Only Bunnies could grow them, after all. That being said, if they were forced to use more Spell Stones to grow them, they wouldn’t have much of a profit margin. With each passing year, it became more difficult for the Bunnies to make a decent living, worsening their poverty. Recently, many of the villagers had migrated east to Animania, but these two had too strong of convictions to abandon their village, as they somehow managed to squeak by. All the while, they couldn’t help but sense the incoming collapse of their beloved village. That was when the Demon Lord and Holy Maiden arrived.

“So, they really are just humans with rabbit ears.”

“I hear that Bunnies are very popular up north for how cute they are.”

“There are furies in any world, it seems like.”

“Furies...? You know, you use some weird words sometimes.”

At this moment, the impending collapse of the village seemed to run away in terror of the Demon Lord.

† † †

“I see. The problem is that you don’t have any water...”

After listening to what the Bunnies had to say, the Demon Lord looked over the field. Of course, he had no knowledge of farming, but producing water certainly wasn’t a problem for him. The ubiquitous healing item in the Game was Bottle of Water, but players could use a Bucket to obtain a large amount of water from a well. Game logic had prevented the players from using any of it without first bottling it, though. Even from a dry well, the item would simply produce the end-result of a full bucket, the Demon Lord figured. He expected no issues using it in this world.

“Wow. Look at these poor people, destitute without any help from their lady of the land. Some Holy Maiden you are.” The Demon Lord said this with plenty of sarcasm, partially in retaliation for Luna pulling on his hair earlier.

“Wh-What was I supposed to do...? They always told me not to get myself involved in worldly things like this...!”

This confirmed the Demon Lord’s presumption, that Luna was just a figurehead. They would use her as a weapon, but keep her out of anything that didn’t involve the battlefield. Revered, secluded, and kept far away from any financial matters. This wasn’t an unusual way to treat royalty in any world, though.

“Ah, Kyon, was it? Is there a well in this village?”

“Th-There is... Hoppity.”

The Demon Lord winced at the horribly clichéd catchphrase.

“...I have to ask. What’s with the contrived catchphrase?”

“H-Humans are usually disappointed if we don’t use them... Hoppity.”

“My apologies, but please just talk to me normally.”

If he could have, the Demon Lord would have demanded to figure out who in their right mind came up with such a thing.

“And Momo, was it? Same goes for you.”

“Got it... Hippity.”

“You don’t ‘got it,’ though, do you!?”

(Dammit...! What is it with these guys!?)

The Demon Lord couldn’t help but interject, breaking his character. What’s worse, the two Bunnies seemed completely earnest. This wasn’t a joke to them.

“The well is this way... Hoppity.”

“Agh, jeez. Just take me there, already.”

Controlling the urge to yank on their pointed ears, the Demon Lord followed them through the village. The well they had showed him to was, indeed, completely dried up. They couldn’t even produce enough water to drink without using Spell Stones, let alone enough to farm.

(Now, a Bucket... is a Novice item, huh? 5 SP.)

Most likely, the cost was set low because the water produced by it was useless in the game without being bottled. The Demon Lord didn't mind this at all... he had 265 SP remaining. Even after accounting for what it would take to build the Hospital and Hot Springs Resort, there was plenty of SP left over.

(I could craft some food and drink items... but those would be short-lived, of course.) There were various food items implemented in the game. Cookies, Rice Cakes, and White Bread were some of the more common varieties found in the arena. He had, for some reason, also put in a bit too much effort when it came to canned fruits. There were canned cherries, peaches, tangerines, pineapples, and more. In addition, there were items like the nutritious Rice-and-Herb Porridge, visually appealing Dumplings in various forms, Ice Cream Bars, and even fictional things like Mammoth Meat and the cartoonish Lump of Meat. Even when it came to drinks, the game was stocked with Sports Drinks, Beer, Brandy, Sake, Barley Liquor, Rice Liquor, and all sorts of Energy Drinks. What's more, there was produce like Sweet Potatoes, Russet Potatoes, Onions, and Garlic, as well as fresh fruit like Melons, Strawberries, Tangerines, Apples, Kiwis, Lychees, and Mangoes. He couldn't possibly earn enough SP to continue producing these to feed the village, but producing a sample of some would allow the Bunnies to yield crops from their seeds. There were 1901 different items that were scattered around the Arena, in addition to the items that could only be found using skills. All in all, there were easily over 2000 items in the game.

"The word impossible really isn't in the Empire's dictiona-... Hm?"

The Demon Lord pulled his usual line, but realized that everyone was looking at him funny. It seemed that he was lost in thought for a while.

(Whoops. I kind of lose myself when I start remembering things about the Game.) As if to change the subject, the Demon Lord started crafting an item.

"Let's begin. Craft Novice Item... Bucket."

Using the admin feature, he produced the Bucket from the pitch-black void. It looked to be built much better than he had expected.

"Wh-Where do you... get these things, anyway!? What is that!?" Luna asked.

"A fragment of my brilliance... I suppose."

The Demon Lord dodged the question with this line. He couldn't really explain it, after all. His best guess was that when the Still Angel summoned the Demon Lord, his powers from the game came with him. But when it came to the logistics of it all, he was clueless. He almost wanted to tell Luna to ask the very angel she worshipped.

"Now, let's give this thing a try."

"U-Um... That well has been dry for years... Hoppity."

"My Bucket will come up full. Regardless of the well's state."

"I don't understand what you're saying, hippity."

"I don't understand your catchphrases, either..." the Demon Lord said as he attached the Bucket and the wheel to the well. After lowering the bucket to the bottom of the well, he pulled it right up. The wheel, of course, allowed most anyone to pull up the bucket regardless of their physical strength. As he had presumed, the bucket came up filled to the brim with water.

"H-Hold on! What's going on, Demon Lord!?"

Luna started trembling upon seeing this. Who could have blamed her after watching a dry well yield a bucket full of water?

"Momo, look! Look at all that water!"

"No... What's happening!?"

(So you guys *can* talk normal!)

The Demon Lord noticed, but only stuck his finger into the water and tasted it. Normal water, as expected. If this had been the kind of water that healed 20 HP, he would have had to scrap the idea. He didn't see a problem in using the Bucket since the water had no effect, but he still wanted to keep it on the down-low as long as the demand for water was so high in this country that Water Spell Stones were on the market. He figured that the Bunnies should simply claim that the well was no longer dry, instead of divulging this item's existence.

"This is a magic bucket from my country. As you just saw, it can yield water even out of dry wells," the Demon Lord ceremoniously explained.

“I’m sure you all recognize how precious this magical item is. Just one of these could start a war.”

Even as he kept at it from his high horse, he felt a pinch of guilt remembering that he had produced it for a mere 5 SP. His claim was so far off of the item’s value in the system of the game. Still, Luna and the Bunnies seemed to get the point, as they sincerely nodded in response.

“This secret won’t leave the village... Hoppity!”

“Thank you, thank you! We can grow a healthy crop of carrots now, hippity!”

(I knew it. They’re doing it on purpose. I’m not going to acknowledge it anymore.) Then the Demon Lord crafted another item. He didn’t think water alone would be enough when it came to farming.

“Craft Intermediate Item... Fertilizer.”

He removed a large plastic bag filled with fertilizer from the void. While it was called Fertilizer, this item was used as a part to make a bomb. Not even the Demon Lord had ever imagined it coming in handy like this.

“Use this fertilizer. I’ll leave the precise methods up to you.”

He had no clue how much of the fertilizer to use nor when to apply it. He thought it best to leave that to the professional farmers. Just like the Bucket, he assumed, the Fertilizer would provide nutrition to the soil via game logic, regardless of logistics. It was funny how an item that had been intended for crafting a weapon was now used to help give life to crops.

“Momo, this fertilizer is amazing! I feel the Force of Earth!”

“W-Wow... It’s overflowing with the Force of Bounty!”

The Bunnies clamored, but the Demon Lord didn’t understand what they were saying. He was just happy that the item seemed to be a useful one.

(This should bring some vitality back to the village. The best facilities in the world still won’t draw a crowd if the place feels depressing.) After giving some minute directions to the Bunnies, the Demon Lord left.

“Y-You’re... not all bad, after all...” Luna said.

“Posh. I’m not a saint. I have my ulterior motives.”

“Ulterior motives? Y-You wouldn’t do unspeakable things to those Bunnies!?”

“You idiot. We’ll need some workers for the hospital and the resort. I want the Bunnies to work for me when they’re built.”

As the Bunnies were adorable to look at, he imagined that they would prove popular among the customers. Quite a few bars and casinos in the real world employed waitresses in bunny ears, leotards and fish-net stockings, after all.

“That’s the most basic of groundwork done. Let’s wait to build them until we return from the Holy City.”

“You better buy me a drink when we get there. And I’m going to go clothes shopping, too!”

“Why do you think I’ll come along on your shopping spree?”

After the Storm

After the Demon Lord had left, the Bunnies jumped to stockpiling water. They were told that the Bucket was magical, but they didn’t know how long it would last. Most magic in this world lost its effect either immediately or over a short period of time. The Bunnies were taking a natural course of action with their preconceptions.

“Bring out all the pails we have in the village!”

“The leather canteens, too!”

All of the kids, as well as the adults, started running all over the village. Everyone was desperate to secure as many buckets of water as possible while the magic was working.

“Next pail!”

“Let’s switch places. We’ll take turns pulling up the bucket.”

While the wheel allowed even a child to pull up the bucket, they were having trouble as they rushed to yank it up.

“Calm down. You just have to turn the wheel steadily.”

“O-Okay...!”

The Bunnies pulled bucket after bucket until all of the pails in their village were filled with water, but there was no sign that the magic was weakening.

“W-Will this bucket... keep bringing out water forever?”

“No way...”

Once the Bunnies started to calm down, fear began to creep up on them. Their familiar well, which had dried up ages ago, was now something unfathomable. It was as if the well had been painted in a different light than the rest of the village.

“Momo...”

“I know.”

Kyon called out nervously, and Momo responded with gravity. They now understood that, if news of this bucket got out, they could all end up dead. Holylight was already hostile towards non-human races. It was a harsh environment for Demi-Humans, like Animas, Elves, and Dwarfs. Many humans in the nation were openly antagonistic towards them. Picturing those people, Momo resolved... never to give up the bucket. If anyone tried to take it from them, the Bunnies would gather their arms and fight to protect the bucket. After witnessing its power, they had no other choice. If it came down to that, they could expect the opposition to employ any means necessary.

“B-But, Miss Luna will protect us, right...? She’ll make sure we won’t...”

“...Yeah.”

Kyon suggested desperately, but Momo still looked uneasy. While Luna was feared and revered by all in the country, she had little interest in their village. ‘Just do what you want’ was her go-to line. For better or worse, the Bunnies had been left with full autonomy. Luna’s status prevented her from spending much time in the village, but even the middle-aged man sent from the Church as the substitute lord of the land showed no interest in the village’s welfare. While he didn’t show any open prejudice towards the Bunnies, perhaps because of their status as a village that belonged to a Holy Maiden, it was written all over his face that he wanted nothing to do with the village. The Bunnies had

pleaded with him about their miserable situation, only to be met with a sneer. He was no more than a statue to them.

While things had improved since Luna became their lady, there were countless Bunnies who had abandoned their homes and left the village of Rabbi to find a new land for themselves after generations of mistreatment. In the end, the population of Rabbi had decreased from two thousand Bunnies to three hundred, including children.

(If a battle broke out here and now... There would be no one left alive in this village.) There were sure to be countless people who would want that bucket. Nobles, Bandits... that bucket could even turn a good man bad. Momo recalled what the man called Demon Lord had said: *Just one of these could start a war.*

Momo couldn't help but tremble and swallow some saliva.

"Kyon, put out a strict gag law."

"O-Okay..."

"And let's gather the men to rebuild the fence. And gather all the weapons in..."

"I don't think that's such a good idea..."

"...Why not?"

"They'll think we're hiding something."

While Momo tried to solidify their defenses out of fear, Kyon objected with childlike logic. True, it wasn't smart for them to shore up their defenses out of the blue. Everyone would wonder what caused them to take such actions.

"Right. If we make any sudden moves, they'll wonder why..."

"Mm-hm. I just think we should carry on like nothing's changed..."

In fact, since no one ever visited the crumbling village of Rabbi, it was a perfect spot for keeping the Bucket a secret. If they kept their heads low, the Bunnies could keep this a secret for at least a while. Then, a voice suddenly rang in Kyon's and Momo's heads.

Uh... Kyon and Momo, was it? Can you hear me?

A Communication from the cause of all of their new-found troubles, the Demon Lord. He was just trying to see how things had turned out after his departure.

Agghhhh! What's this scary voice in my head, hoppity!?

Oh, no... He's completely cursed us, hippity.

What do you mean 'curse'!?

While Kyon and Momo were taken by surprise at first, Communication was a very useful tool once they had gotten used to it. Since the participants could communicate remotely, it was almost like a cell phone. The two Bunnies spoke concisely about what had happened, and the Demon Lord seemed satisfied.

Hm. A sudden move would arouse suspicion from neighboring villages. That was a good call.

But I think we'll be found out eventually, hoppity...

No matter. We'll put up some defenses of our own. Stay out of trouble until I return.

The Demon Lord had finally found his bridgehead. He had no intention of giving up this village, no matter the cost. In fact, he was ready to take on any invaders with no mercy.

And, as to where the fertilizer should be used...

After some more notes from the Demon Lord, the communication ended. With a sigh, the two Bunnies looked at each other. They were feeling dread and relief at once. A difficult emotion to describe.

"Who was that man, hoppity...?"

"Calm down, Kyon. No one's here, hippity."

"...Right back at you, Momo."

Rattled by the surreal form of communication, they couldn't help but keep using their Bunny catchphrases, even though no one was around.

"A-Anyway. Let's try using the fertilizer tomorrow."

"Yes. The thing inside that bag... is amazing."

The Bunnies had a special power. While ‘the ability to grow carrots’ may not sound like much, its effects were tremendous. They were able to grow the best crop on the continent. The other crops in this world didn’t even come close to holding a candle against the carrot. Until now, the scorched land and lack of water had sabotaged their yield, but that was all about to change. In fact, not just their farms, but the entire continent was about to undergo a drastic change...

The Holy Nation

—The Holy Castle, Holylight

Holylight was a nation ruled by a trio of Holy Maidens. Below them were the Holy Church and the Holy Knights’ Order, both on equal footing. All three branches joined forces to protect the nation from any foreign hostilities. The Church welcomed all into their organization, from orphans to high nobles, as long as they showed potential for wielding magic. Similarly, the Knights’ Order welcomed all with combat potential. Naturally, each organization rigorously tested their applicants, although they allowed anyone to apply. This was a rare custom not only in Holylight, but even in neighboring countries.

However, nobles have been encroaching upon the Knights’ Order, beginning to control the organization. Flashing anything from power, valor, and money, the nobles gradually wrapped their fingers around the Order. This was because the opinion of the Knights’ Order carried considerable weight when it came to the selection of Holy Maidens.

On the other hand, members of the Church were not as easily bought out. Along with talents for magic, as they were servants of the Angel, strict virtue was required of them. Not even the nobles could have bribed their way into the Church. So, they honed in on the Knights’ Order, slinking their way into the organization in order to select Holy Maidens that would serve their cause.

And now, they had influenced the selection of two Holy Maidens nearly perfect for their cause. Luna Elegant, who was talented in magic but lacked interest in politics, and Killer Queen, who was a top-tier fighter with no eye for politics nor money. Having two thirds of the Holy Maidens showing no interest

in politics or power-plays was an ideal situation for them, as they could do as they pleased.

With that situation as their backdrop, the third Holy Maiden was holding a meeting with two of the top nobles in the country.

“How wonderful to see Miss Luna realizing her responsibilities as a Holy Maiden...”

A man said with an oily smile, jiggling his fat body. His name was Dona Dona, the most influential noble in the country, with many nobles under his thumb. True to the stereotype, he lusted after young women and money alike. At the same time, he was a natural born politician. The command he held over the nobles was formidable. In addition, he was the puppeteer behind Holylight’s economics, as he held many mines within his land, he had been hiking up the prices for Spell Stones year after year.

“...Joyous,” spoke Marshall Harts, sitting across from Dona. Built far too muscular for a noble, he even donned armor at the table. While over sixty years of age, with his white hair tied up in the back, his eyes shone with intensity. A veteran warrior in charge of the more militaristic nobles.

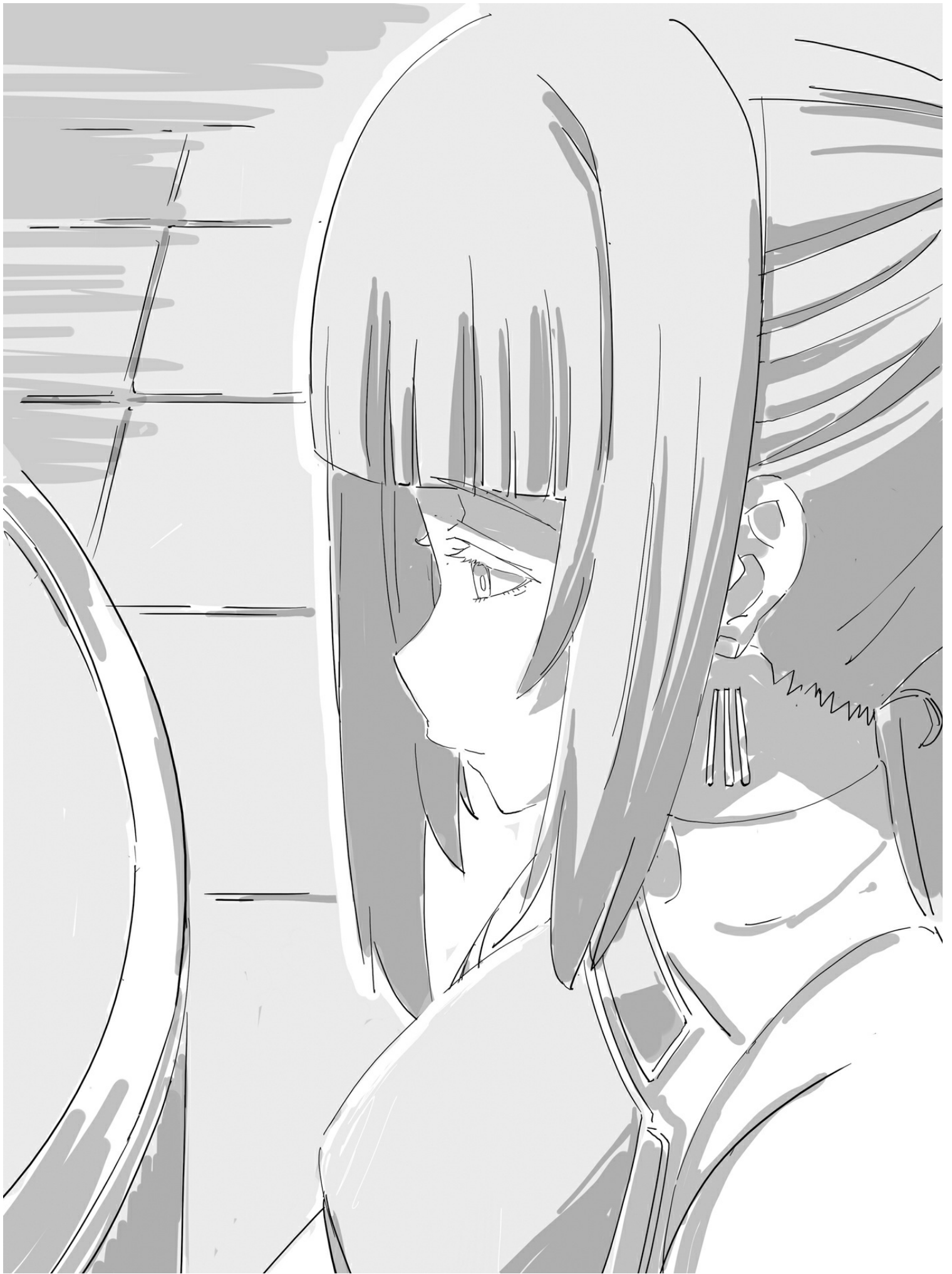
“But I am worried... that she’s being taken advantage of by that man who claims to be the Demon Lord.”

Sitting farthest from the entrance at the roundtable, the final Holy Maiden spoke, shaking her pink hair. Her name was Angel White. Everything from her hair, eyes, and lips were of a light pink. Even the air about her seemed divine... Her beauty was out of this world.

Looking at her, Dona Dona audibly swallowed. His perverted thoughts were written all over his face. He was scheming to take the Holy Maiden for himself, one day.

“No need for concern, m’lady. At your command, I shall take care of him...” Dona Dona said, moving his slimy gaze down towards the Holy Maiden’s breasts. Anyone could see that his hands were squeezing down those ample peaks in his mind. In fact, his hands were making the gesture under the roundtable.

Of course, the topic of today's meeting was the Holy Maiden Luna. To their surprise, she had decided to rule a land she had completely left to the Church's representative up to this point. Was this a baby step in the right direction, or an indication that something was wrong? White didn't know what to make of it.



Leaving White to her contemplation, the two nobles clashed.

“...Miss Luna trusts this man. There’s nothing for us to do.”

“Hmph! The city is already filled with wanted posters of his!”

“...Dona. What harm has this man caused, exactly? You dare punish a man in Miss Luna’s trust for a few bad rumors?”

“Billitzo has reported that an entire remote village of his had been burned down! Besides, he threw Miss Luna’s guards into the air!”

Without even attempting to conceal their animosity toward the other, the two nobles stared down. Not only were their views of the nation polar opposite to one another, their personalities were just incompatible.

“...According to my source, it was only a farm house that was burned down. Billitzo’s crying wolf.”

“Harts! You accuse a noble of lying!?”

“...Regardless of rank, I trust the words of those worthy of my trust. I believe my subordinate over Billitzo.”

The stare down ensued. Because of the division under the surface among the nobles, who controlled the economy, and the armed forces, Holylight was in the midst of a long-term slump.

“It’s not every day that she shows initiative for something... I won’t interfere, just yet.”

“If you say so, m’lady...”

“...Understood.”

While Dona agreed with visible disdain, Harts simply closed his eyes.

As soon as the two nobles had left the room, Queen burst through the door, and made a ruckus as she took her seat. As if she had nowhere else to put them, her feet were strewn on top of the roundtable. Her demeanor was utterly devoid of etiquette or manners.

“I heard you were in pretty big trouble the other day... I’m glad you’re safe.” White said, but Queen didn’t seem all there. Perhaps she didn’t even hear her

sister speak.

“...I’m in love.”

“What?”

“I’m in love with that guy... I remember it clear as day. The coolest guy I’ve ever seen.”

“W-Wait a minute... What are you talking about?”

White and Queen had known each other for a long time, and she had gotten accustomed to Queen’s outrageous demeanor, but she still couldn’t believe the words that had come out of her sister. White had considered Queen to be the furthest person in this world from romance.

“You’re not talking about the rumored Dragonborn...? Um, Queen. You know Dragonborns don’t exist, right...?”

“Says you, sis! ‘Cus you didn’t see him with your own eyes! His punch! His stance! His gallant face! His rocking one-liners!”

“C-Calm down...”

“I got to find Sir Zero, quick... Aghhh! I want to bury my face into that jacket...!”

“What? Are both of my sisters broken...!?”

Angel White... the one and only level-headed Holy Maiden. Naturally, she was often left to pick up the mess. And it didn’t look like that was going to change anytime soon.

† † †

A few days later...

“This is the Holy City, huh...? It’s bigger than I imagined.”

The Demon Lord was blown away by his first encounter with a large city in a fantasy world. He was most surprised by the deep moat surrounding the city, which was filled to the brim with water. Sure, it must have been effective defensively, but the value of water in this city seemed to be different from the rest of the country.

“It-It’s amazing! It’s my first time in the Holy City, too!”

“You know, Aku... The Holy Castle over there is my home.”

“You live in that giant castle!? Wow, Miss Holy Maiden, you’re amazing!”

“Yep. I’m the best Holy Maiden there is... And I’m going to rule this nation, some day!”

(What an idiot.)

As far the Demon Lord could imagine, if Luna were to take control of this country, she would wreck the economy or cause a coup within the first three days. He guessed that her Politics stat, if there was such a thing in this world, would be at 1, or 2, at best.

Mister Secretary, there seems to be some sort of checkpoint at the entrance.

I see. They do have some crime-prevention systems, then.

Even in modern day Japan, security at airports was tight, not to mention in other countries. Entering another country could take a considerable amount of time thanks to cross-referencing each applicant with crime databases around the world. Since there was a wanted poster going around of the Demon Lord, he expected that their entrance might be a bit of a struggle.

“As planned, Luna?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure they’ll know you’re my servant.”

“An associate... You must be dumber than a chicken.”

While the Demon Lord planned to squeak by with Luna’s clout, the guard seemed to have gotten the memo already. They made it through the gate, almost too easily.

(I doubt they’ll throw me a welcome party, but... Not going to turn me away at the gate, huh?) It did seem a little odd, considering how he treated Luna’s guards.

Perhaps there’s someone, whether it be another Holy Maiden or a noble, who wants to have a word with you, sir?

That’s my guess, too. Let’s see what’s behind door number one.

And so, the Demon Lord entered the Holy City. It didn't feel like he could get away with doing a little research in quiet before heading back out.

Dinner Party

—Nighttime in the Holy City

(Now we have a room...)

Using his gold medallion, the Demon Lord had secured a place to stay in the Holy City. A pretty famous, high-class hotel, in fact. Considering his lack of funds, he could have gone with a cheaper inn, but he felt it best to advertise his tycoon image if he wanted to advertise his resort and hospital down the line. The same pitch could carry different weight depending on what's in the presenter's pocket.

"What was the place called? Artemis?"

The restaurant Luna had mentioned had a pretty tame name for once. Although, it was kind of sad that the Demon Lord felt joy in hearing a name that wasn't jarring to him.

"Yes. A respectable establishment patronized by cultured individuals like myself."

"Cultured, huh...? Why are you staying with us at the inn, anyway?"

"W-Why should you care... where I stay!?"

(I care because I paid for the room!)

The Demon Lord felt the urge to pinch Luna's mouth shut. As he didn't want to cause a scene, though, he ended up walking down the street looking like he had a bitter lime in his mouth. Of course, being the quartet of a Holy Maiden, the man who called himself the Demon Lord, a stunning woman in a lab coat, and a girl in a white dress who looked like a princess... They already garnered some attention. Whispers could be heard in the street as they passed by.

It's been a while, hasn't it...? Mister Secretary.

...Sure has.

He agreed without much thought, but he was clueless what Yu found so nostalgic about this situation.

They're just like the pitiful crowds in occupied territories surrendering to our forces. It feels like it was just yesterday when Shizuka took away the arms and legs of that child who threw a stone at us.

H-Heh heh...

He could only muster a twitchy chuckle as Yu recalled the scene in ecstasy. This incident had been drawn up by him as an episode in the game. For his advisors, these stories were a reality. Shizuka especially had a few of these gruesome tales under her belt, shedding light on how dangerous she really was. Many of the countless episodes he had written served to illustrate the ruthlessness of the Empire. For Akira Ono, the creator of the game, these had only been sprinkles of backstory for his characters. Realizing that all of them had really taken place, the Demon Lord internally shuddered.

Aku timidly spoke to the now silent Demon Lord.

"Master Demon Lord... Are you sure I can go into such an extravagant restaurant?"

"There's nothing to worry about. You look like a princess, Aku."

"A p-princess..."

Watching her blush and shy away, the Demon Lord calmed his nerves. It seemed like Aku was starting to become a sort of rock for him.

(In any case... The cityscape is dreamlike.)

He thought, gazing on the glittering Holy City. Lighting up the night, there were streetlamps that illuminated the city in various colors, almost as much as a modern-day metropolis was lit up. There was even a fountain on the main street, and he could spot many lovebirds nestling around it.

(And people here are dressed completely different.)

Of course, they were much cleaner than what the Demon Lord had gotten used to seeing, but he noticed that many of the outfits he saw were fashion-

conscious. Their hairstyles seemed particular too, and it looked like many people put work into them. During the day, he had gotten the impression of a bustling city, but at night, the city came alive with nightlife like it did in Shibuya. Various signs using Spell Stones aligned the streets, and dolled up women stood in front of bars to call in pedestrians. At this rate, there was sure to be a red-light district, somewhere.

(Holy City by day, and something else by night...)

“Interesting,” the Demon Lord thought. He seemed to like that the city wasn’t just prim and proper. While he didn’t dislike solemn atmospheres that could be found at temples, he didn’t dislike bright, bustling cities like this, either.

“Luna, this is an interesting city.”

“R-Really? I didn’t expect the compliment from you...”

Luna replied, taken by surprise. Sincerely, the Demon Lord felt like he had a grasp on something upon experiencing this city.

“This is a lot more straightforward than some Angel nonsense. Human desire epitomized... We’re at the core of this country.”

People who have worked hard and improved themselves to obtain power and wealth... The Holy City welcomed those who had ‘made it.’ It seemed much more real to him than some sketchy promise of a blissful afterlife.

“Desire...? You know... Oh, we’re here. This is Artemis.”

“Hm... Shall we?”

The party walked through the door of Artemis. Inside was another world entirely, and that much was clear just by looking at the patrons. Dressed in obviously extravagant attire, they nibbled on their wine and meat while elegantly engaging in conversation. It was obviously a place for the social elite.

“Why, Miss Luna. Welcome back...”

“Hi. I’m looking forward to what you have for me, today.”

As soon as they sat down at a table, someone who acted like the manager came to greet them. The title of a Holy Maiden seemed to carry as much weight as the Demon Lord had expected. He self-importantly told the manager to

surprise him for his entrée before ordering a drink, since he was nervous he wouldn't understand a dinner menu in this world. He smoothly ordered a drink, and Yu ordered white wine after him.

“Now, to celebrate Aku's recovery, let's toast...”

Aku was getting dizzy by the onslaught of dish after dish being brought to the table, but the Demon Lord was just as nervous on the inside. However, as table manners seemed to be ingrained in the muscle memory of Hakuto Kunai, he seamlessly kept his etiquette as if he was a born noble.

“Aku, don't worry about etiquette. Enjoy the meal however you'd like.”

“O-Okay!”

She had been eyeing each dish as it came to the table, but seemed a little nervous.

(Maybe I'll take her to a more casual joint next time... I won't have to worry about much if we go alone.) He was the type to walk into a rice-bowl joint for a quick lunch, and wasn't used to these fancy dinner scenes.

The food isn't bad, but it's far inferior compared to what's in our world...

Well, that is to be expected.

The Demon Lord answered internally to Yu's Communication. Most of the food in the Game could be found in modern-day Japan. Naturally, the Demon Lord imagined, they would taste amazing if brought to life. Japan, after all, was a country so dedicated to food, that they would air in ingredients just for their fast food. It wasn't really fair to compare that to the food of this world, where technology in food storage, processing, and cooking were much less developed.

(Speaking of celebrations... We need a cake.)

There was a cake item in the Game, but it had to be made from Food, a Craft Item. A player could choose from the following four options for healing items: -

Breakfast Platter x1 — Heal 50 HP

-Vegetable Soup x2 — Heal 25 HP

-Strawberry Tart x1 — Heal 50 SP

-Cheesecake x2 — Heal 25 SP

In addition, players who had the Cooking Survival skill had additional options:

-Wild Rice x2 — Heal 50 HP

-Chicken Noodle Soup x2 — Heal 50 SP

-Nabe x1 — Heal 100 SP

Unfortunately, the Demon Lord didn't possess the Cooking skill. He wouldn't be able to craft those additional items until he unlocked the feature to earn skills, or he summoned an advisor who had the Cooking skill.

"Craft Advanced Item... Food."

He created a Food under the table. Despite its name, it was a shiny white sphere. He assumed it must have taken this shape since there were options on what to change it into.

(While we're here, I guess I can showboat a little.)

"Craft Item... Strawberry Tart."

Although he thought it might be a little corny, the Demon Lord snapped his fingers as if to perform a magic trick. The Food changed its shape as they watched, morphing into a Strawberry Tart with a flash of light. For those watching, this was real magic.

"Wow! Master Demon Lord, is that a dessert!?"

"W-What is that thing!? It's so cute!"

As expected, it seemed that sweets were well-received by women in any world. While the magic trick had cost the Demon Lord 20 SP, the smile on Aku's face was worth it. It's not like the Demon Lord had made it himself, but he wore a smug expression as if to say 'yep, I'm a world-class baker. What of it?'

"A little gift from me, Aku... Yu, can you serve them out, please?"

"Yes, Mister Secretary."

As it had the effect to heal 50 SP, he expected it to wash away the stress of the long trip. He had killed two birds with one stone. A piece of tart was served to each member at the table. The Demon Lord timidly took a bite. He was

confident of the quality of Empire items, but he couldn't be certain until he tasted it.

"It's sweet! It's delicious! It's so cute!"

Aku let out with a brimming smile.

"Noooo! It's so good! I can't believe it! What magic did you use!?"

"This makes my mouth happy, Mister Secretary..."

"G-Good... I'm glad."

The Demon Lord couldn't help but wonder if the girls were making too much of a big deal out of this. However, in a world that was scarce of sweet flavors, a strawberry tart was mind-boggling. More like a weapon of mass-dessert-ion.

"Looks like you're having fun... Little Luna."

"Fha? Madame!?"

They looked up to find a lady in a turquoise dress who was obviously wealthy. On her fingers were rings that almost looked too clunky. One on each finger, in fact.

(Who is this billionaire...? Her whole body is gleaming.)

The Demon Lord moved to discover who the lady was. He had to keep a steady footing if he wanted to start off his business right. Standing, he greeted the lady with an elegant bow.

"Ah, Madame. Pleased to make your acquaintance... My name is Hakuto Kunai."

"Oh, where are my manners? I'm Butterscotch Butterfly."

(What are you, a cartoon!?)

The Demon Lord might have burst out laughing if he wasn't so infuriated. What in the world were her parents thinking? He was dazed.

Luna, who is this woman?

Huh!? I can hear the Demon Lord's perverted voice in my head!

Give up the perverted thing, already. Answer me.

She's like the leader of the nobles' wives... All the nobles know her, and she has a lot of influence, so she scares me...

So, she's the queen bee of the bored Madames of this world.

Churning the gears in his head, the Demon Lord schemed. He was the type to stay light on his feet in these situations. Once committed, the Demon Lord had the balls to pull off any performance.

(Give her a good pitch, and I could reap all sorts of benefits...) Of course, there was no world wide web in this world. So, the Demon Lord figured, a good word of mouth from someone influential would greatly aid his venture. A queen of the noble wives could possess the power to change the course of his business.

"Madame... Will you grant me the honor of joining us at the table?"

"H-Hey, Demon Lord!"

"Ooh, an invitation from the infamous Demon Lord himself... How exciting."

(What's she got up her sleeve?)

The Demon Lord thought. Apparently, she had walked right over knowing full well who he was. He could imagine the headache of dealing with a bunch of nobles' wives, and couldn't see through what she had in mind or the skills she possessed.

(Anyway, she looks a lot like a certain deluxe celebrity... They could be twins.) Her mountain-like stature showed her lack of an exercise routine. Moreover, she looked nearly identical... to a certain someone.

(Here to get some gossip? You're about to get the horns, lady.) And so, they began what at least appeared to be pleasant small talk.

Meanwhile, under the surface... the Satanists were patiently waiting for their cue in the darkness.

You Unlocked Some Information!!

Craft Items

There are other examples of Craft Items, like Weapon Material and Illegal Substance. The former creates an item that added 2 to the Attack of a weapon, and the latter gives various stat boosts. Due to concerns for game balance, they were difficult to obtain, and required the Genius or Illegal Substance skill to use, respectively. Another example is the Mystery Item, which provides random effects. Items like the Mikuji and Horoscope produce positive or negative effects depending on the player's fortune. They might even debuff the player's stats, so they should be used with caution. Items like the Grab Bag, Small Treasure Chest, Piggy Bank, and Santa's Bag can often produce rare items. Once in a while, though, they were sure to disappoint with a garbage item.

Sign of Trouble

A particular table in Artemis had garnered some attention. Elegant music from various instruments filled the restaurant for the patrons' entertainment, but they were all focused on that table. At this particular table, there was a Holy Maiden, the man who called himself the Demon Lord, and Madame Butterfly. There were plenty of nobles who were kept under their wife's thumb, and the big boss of those scary wives was her. Her influence was tremendous—those who ended up in her bad graces were exiled from the social scene. The unaffected patrons of the restaurant watched on, more nervous than those at the table.

"Let me say... your beauty astounds me, Madame. I am humbled at imagining the work you've put into your appearance."

"Oh, are you flirting with an old lady like me?"

Even as they began their small talk, their eyes remained cold. With the way they dug for each other's information under the surface, they might as well have been holding blades at each other's throats.

"So, what do you think of our city, Mister Demon Lord...?"

"It's wonderful. So straightforward and simple."

"...Many of our foreign visitors are surprised when they see the city. Often, they'll tell me that we live in heaven compared to those less fortunate — who live in hell, as they describe it."

"That's a good way to put it. I have a solution for that, though."

At this point, the Demon Lord paused. He lit his cigarette with leisure and started enjoying his smoke without any intention of continuing the conversation.

Eventually, Madame Butterfly leaned over the table, running impatient.

"I would love to hear it. Lend us your wisdom, Master Demon Lord."

"It's easy, really... Make it heaven, everywhere. Problem solved. Very simple."

“Every... Th-That’s an awfully grandiose idea.”

“...If I were to rule this nation, I could make it happen in a few years.”

The Madame fell speechless. This was more than blowing smoke. Most would have wondered if a screw was missing from his head. He surely wasn’t the first to talk a big game in order to garner favors with the Madame, but no one had been so cocky before. Of course, he had no way of turning this world into a utopia. If he did, he would have been a politician or something in the real world.

(Haha! How’s she going to prove me wrong?)

There it was. In some sense, he had embraced his situation, but this act was a Hail Mary to leave Madame Butterfly with the impression that he was a person somehow beyond their understanding. However, the Madame noticed that the gorgeous woman sitting next to him seemed to confirm his claim, without even saying a word. Her demeanor made it seem like there was no lie or exaggeration in what he had just said.

“But national politics bore me... I want to provide you, Madame, with a different kind of heaven, first.”

“How intriguing... What kind of heaven are we talking about?”

The Demon Lord wrapped what he had created under the table in a fancy sheet of paper before handing it to the Madame. A bar of Soap, so popular with the ladies. The Madame, though, didn’t know what to make of it. After talking of such a big game, he handed over a bar of soap. While it did cost a few gold coins in this country, it wasn’t something the Madame wasn’t used to seeing, or even happy to receive as a gift.

“Oh, that soap is amazing!”

“Ah, is this what you use, Little Luna...?”

“It cleans you up like magic! My skin glowed after using it!”

“Ma... Glowed, you say...”

(Thanks for the assist, Luna!)

The Demon Lord celebrated the unexpected back-up. In fact, the word ‘magic’ from Luna carried a lot of weight. From the Madame’s perspective, Luna was

just a child, and she socialized with her to admire her innocence... Except when it came to magic. She recognized that Luna's talent for magic was the real deal. She also knew that Luna's sense of self-esteem relied on her pride in her magic. When Luna mentioned magic, that resonated with Madame Butterfly.

"Not that you mention it, all the ladies at the table have glowing skin."

Looking around at them, Madame showed a flash of envy. Every one of them were young, without a wrinkle on their face. To boot, they were all very attractive.

"Please, give it a try. You'll see its effects with your own eyes."

"I think I will... Thank you for your wonderful gift, Mister Demon Lord."

She couldn't help but give a wishful gaze at the bar of soap. No matter the age, women always longed for good skin, and no amount of money could reverse time. The subject of beauty was this Madame's only weakness.

"Please, don't thank me for such a trivial token. Pretty soon, I plan to set up a hot springs resort in the village of Rabbi... Your skin, and your entire body will, literally, be renewed."

That line was a siren's song, befitting of the king of all evil.

"Renewed... That's another grandiose claim."

"I make no exaggerations or falsities about what I do... Everything I say will become reality."

He was now blowing smoke with no end in sight. This was now the Demon Lord's solo performance.

"There will be more than mere hot springs, but carbonated springs, one-person springs, hot rock beds, cold baths, electric baths, herbal baths, salt and mist saunas, vitality saunas and many more options. Not only will they be refreshing, but they will help with tight shoulders, back pain, and blood circulation. Of course, your skin will look a decade younger."

"R-Really...?"

She didn't understand most of what the Demon Lord had listed, but she felt that whatever it was, it was going to be nothing like she had ever seen before.

She wanted to get up and go there that day, if she could have. In fact, all of that would become a reality once the facility was built. It was originally intended for healing players' HP, but he was sure that the hot springs would really have the effects attributed to them.

"I can't wait... I mean, when do you think this place will be built...?"

"Just as soon as I finish some research here."

"I-I-I will definitely be paying a visit Little Luna, don't tell Buttersauce, okay?"

(Buttersauce!? What's with all the dairy!?)

The Demon Lord interjected internally, without showing a hint of it on his expression. Although, his cigarette trembled slightly as he kept himself from laughing.

"I won't. Things still aren't good with your sister, it sounds like."

"You understand, Little Luna. It's hard for sisters to get along, isn't it?"

(You're both butter, what's not to like...?)

Desperately holding in his laughter, the Demon Lord shook the Madame's hand with a brimming smile. The encounter had startled him at first, but it seemed to end in success.

After that, the party was enjoying their dinner with bright conversation, when a piercing scream echoed from outside, causing a commotion in the restaurant. Then, rumbling and shouting could be heard. The people were all shouting about one thing...

"A Satanist attack!!!"

Hearing this, the Demon Lord's expression shifted. He looked like a child who was given a new toy, bubbling with uncontrollable joy.

"It seems we have just the clown for our post-dinner entertainment..."

Seeing him, Madame Butterfly swallowed audibly. There, she saw someone different than the man she had been conversing with... she saw a bona-fide Demon Lord.

A Glimpse at the Demon Lord

The Holy City was roughly separated into four districts. One of them, of course, was the Holy Castle. Protected by numerous holy barriers, the historical castle rejected all devils, demons, and the like. Even the best of the Hellions would have a hard time infiltrating this structure. In addition, there was the Noble District, which included the Order of Holy Knights' headquarters and the nobles' mansions, the Common District, which included the Holy Church headquarters and the houses of middle-class citizens, and finally the Business District, comprised of various merchants, shops, and business centers like the Adventurer guilds and the red-light district.

The Satanists had initiated a simultaneous attack on all districts, save for the Holy Castle. They had dug underground tunnels over a long period of time, sneaking their way into the earth directly below the Holy City. Imagining the effort it took for them to dig a series of tunnels like this... One could only describe it as madness. They had devoted years to their plan in anticipation of this day.

A crater gaped open in each of the city's districts, and the Satanists, all wearing their uniformed garb, came flooding out of them. Three gigantic holes were agape in the Holy City with an ominous resemblance to Tartarus.

"Coordinated assault, huh...? Not too shabby."

As soon as he left the restaurant, the Demon Lord leapt to the roof, observing the entirety of the Holy City from above. Screaming and shouting also came from the district they were in, and he could see two fires in the distance. Most likely an attempt to divide the city's manpower in three. Coordinated terror attacks: a classic, really.

Returning to the restaurant, the Demon Lord immediately commanded Yu. He wasn't really in a rush, except that he didn't want any SP... err, *enemies* to get away.

"Yu, protect the people here... I'll take care of the commotion."

"Understood, Mister Secretary."

"Wh-Who made you the boss!? I'm going, too!"

“Luna, there’s a chance you’re the target of this attack. I can’t protect you if you’re wandering up and down the streets.”

“P-Protect... I d-d-d-don’t need your protection...”

Luna went quiet and blushed.

(She... is way too easy. I’m starting to worry.)

The Demon Lord couldn’t help but think this, witnessing Luna’s utter lack of social grace with the opposite sex. More importantly, if Luna were to take down any enemies with her spells, that would cut into the Demon Lord’s SP grind.

“Aku, you’ll be safe with Yu. Just enjoy your meal.”

“O-Okay...! B-But will you be all right, Master Demon Lord?”

Aku looked up at him with a worried expression, holding his hand. It was exactly the expression of a daughter worried for her father. The Demon Lord had to internally shake off the mental image of being a single father all of a sudden.

“Just entertainment, like I said... A little post-meal exercise.”

In fact, the only thing he was thinking about was reaping that SP. If the enemy seemed too powerful, he just had to run. He was confident that he could successfully flee the battle, need be.

“You as well, Madame. I hope you enjoy the rest of your meal.”

“You really are a confident man, aren’t you...? Or rather, everything you say becomes reality... was that it?”

“Guilty as charged... It was unfortunate for them that I happened to be here.”

With that, the Demon Lord left the restaurant, and remembered to give Yu a reminder to behave. Who knew what she would do if left unchecked. He could easily imagine returning to a table full of attackers dissected like fish at the market.

Yu, in order to learn... we must be in good standing.

Refrain from cruelty to gain a good reputation?

I’m glad you’re always on top of things. I’m counting on you, Yu...

Y-Yesh shir...!

(Hm? Did she stutter at the end?)

For a moment, her last response had sounded a bit off, and that was uncharacteristic of Yu, of all people.

“Now, where to start...”

On the streets, he could see people running for their lives. It wasn’t an uncommon sight on his TV screen back in Japan. He had witnessed peaceful cities ravaged by terror attacks, and bloodied civilians being carried away in ambulances, all from the comfort of his living room, as if he had nothing to do with it. In fact, he never did have anything to do with it. What person could have a concrete grasp on the effects of terror attacks happening on the other side of the world?

(But here and now, I do have something to do with it...)

While Luna had ways to defend herself, he expected even a small projectile to seriously injure Aku. It seemed counterproductive to let Aku get injured in such a stupid commotion, especially after going through the trouble of healing her foot.

(You guys again...)

In the distance, he could see the familiar men in black robes. Most of them were holding weapons, with a few of them wielding wands. Remembering that they were the cause for him ending up in this world, his fist began to tighten without him realizing.

“Swarming around wherever I go... You want the Demon Lord? You got him.”

Away from the overcrowded streets, the Demon Lord sprung into action, leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

† † †

—Business District

Marge, the leader of the group in this district, couldn’t conceal his frustration. They had started off the attack on the right foot, the element of surprise on their side. Now, however, numerous members of the Adventurers’ Guild had

come out to fight. Of course, the Satanists had accounted for them, but two of the adventurers were especially formidable, hindering the progression of their plan.

“Hrrrrraghhhh! **Power Smash!**”

At this very moment, the olive-skinned warrior woman swung down her giant sword, blowing away three of the Satanists. Her expression was shaded with exhaustion, and she would run out of steam sooner or later. However, Marge would lose many of his men if he just waited around for that to happen.

“Keep it coming! **Power Dance!**”

Swinging her sword full circle, the warrior woman fired off a powerful shockwave around her. Bodies of the attackers in black were torn to bits like pieces of paper, thinning out the Satanists’ man power by the second. Finally, Marge made the decision to go out on the frontlines. He hadn’t planned on spending his Stamina here, but the situation was slipping away from him.

“Adventurer scum...! **Ice Slash!**”

Marge fired off a blade created from the Ice element, an elevation of Water. He could wield up to class 3 Water spells, indicating his prowess in magic. He could only wield up to class 2 Ice spells, but that still set him apart from most mages. But now, a mage wearing faded white incanted a Defense Spell to protect the warrior.

“Frozen tangerine... **Snow’s Kiss.**”

An Ice spell, just like Marge’s, but a class 4. An overpowering anti-Ice Magic Defense was granted to the warrior woman, shattering the blade of ice before it had even reached her.

“Thanks, Yukikaze!”

“...V is for victory. Share happiness.”

The mage mumbled some nonsense which the warrior woman ignored as she charged into the crowd of enemies. The girl called Yukikaze began another incantation to fire her next spell. Normally, after a spell is cast, it would take the mage considerable time before they could cast another, but she seemed

especially powerful, going into a Chain Incantation.

“...Catch me in the crashing waves... **Frost Hands.**”

“It’s really hard down there... **Ice Splash.**”

With the first spell, countless hands of ice erupted from the ground, clasp- ing onto the Satanists’ ankles. Once they were locked in place, they were rushed by icicle spears. After the ruthless Chain Incantation, the Satanists fell to the ground one after another, painting the ice with blood. Despite her cute looks, her attacks were savage.

“Stand your ground! We outnumber them... Keep pushing until your Stamina runs out!”

At Marge’s call, the Satanists rushed from behind him. At this point, the battle became chaotic. Adventurers and Satanists clashed, skyrocketing the number of casualties on both sides. The Satanists’ lingering advantage from the surprise attack was undeniable. Gradually, the adventurers were being overwhelmed. The adventurers had been hit with this situation out of the blue, and were only trying to defend themselves and civilians. On the other hand, the Satanists were suicide soldiers. Every single one of them was ready to die today, while the adventurers had no reason to die fighting for the Holy City, unlike the members of the Knights’ Order or the Church. Some of the adventurers were already getting ready to flee when they noticed others preparing to bail.

“We’re in a bit of a pickle... What should we do, Yukikaze?”

“I don’t want to die a maiden.”

“You understand the situation we’re in, right...? Besides, you’re a dude.”

“You know nothing, Mikan. Even a boy can...”

Before she could finish, a Satanist swung his sword at Yukikaze’s face. Before the sword could reach her, though, a strange sound echoed. It sounded like the atmosphere was sliced through. Then, a sound that resembled a twig snapping, something otherworldly on a battlefield, followed. Despite the shouting and clashing swords, the sound sank into everyone’s ears, as if by some malicious power. It was the sound of the Satanist’s sword arm breaking from some form of impact. The Satanist’s arm, still holding the sword, was flung towards his

back with incredible speed, sending his entire body spinning like a top. Everyone in the area stopped to watch the spinning human top, bewildered. The Satanist eventually stopped, falling to the ground unconscious.

“...That clown had a pretty good trick.”

The crowd looked up to see the Demon Lord clad in a pitch-black coat. He had a few pebbles in his hand, which he tossed lightly in the air now and again. The human spinning top must have been the product of him throwing a pebble. With just a pebble, he reduced that man to a twirling toy. It was all too ridiculous. Not even the deep divide between classes in this country could compare to the impossible gap in power between the Satanists and the Demon Lord.

“Mister Fox... We meet again. Too gorgeous.”

“Demon Lord...! Why are you in the Holy City!?”

Without answering the two adventurers, he jumped off the roof as if it were routine before immediately flowing into his next move. There were around five hundred Satanists in all who had attacked this district, but they were helpless facing off against this man.

“You dare stand in my presence? Kneel... **Overlord.**”

A red aura rose from the Demon Lord's body. As he waved his right hand, a nonelemental storm blew through the streets. It was Overlord, one of the Combat Skills of the Game, dealing damage equivalent to one third of the user's Attack stat. This overwhelming AOE attack tore through the crowd, tearing into the Satanists and flinging their blood about in the wind. However, the Demon Lord's attack was far from over.

Combat in the Game was generally comprised of players collecting skills to form their own selection and chaining them into combos. In addition to normal attacks, there were Chain Attacks that could be used after reaching a certain skill level, elemental and nonelemental skills, Revenge Attacks, special abilities... The right combination could produce astronomical damage. It had been said in the game that the best players could even kill a god.

“I will return you peasants... **Mind's Eye.**”

As the Demon Lord horizontally swung his left hand, a blue aura burst and fanned out, cutting through the hoard of Satanists. In contrast to Overlord, this skill dealt damage equivalent to one third of the user's Defense stat. The Satanists fell to their knees one after another, vomiting up gushes of blood.

"...to your true form... **Obliterate.**"

A yellow aura swirled from the Demon Lord, forming a giant hammer. When the hammer struck down from the sky, a blinding shockwave struck the Satanists. This was a Combat Skill that dealt one tenth of the enemy's current HP to each of them and had a chance to add the Broken Bone status effect. The hips and legs of many of the Satanists were smashed, causing them to fall face-first to the ground.

"That's a good posture... Make sure never to forget it."

After these three nonelemental attacks... there were pathetically defeated Satanists fallen as far as the eye could see. Many had bones which seemed shattered, some were flattened like frogs, and many others had limbs bending in directions they shouldn't.

"I see... Your HP's in the ballpark of 60 to 80."

The Demon Lord mumbled, but no one there would have understood it. There was one thing they understood, though: the man in front of them wasn't just someone claiming to be the Demon Lord, but the actual Demon Lord himself.

"You may not know it, but I've got a pretty good reason to be pissed at you guys."

He mumbled again, too quiet for anyone else to hear, but it held much significance for him. In fact, the Satanists, who had wished to summon the Demon Lord, led to him being in this world.

"I might have a bit of gratitude, now, though..."

When the Demon Lord mumbled this, the now-bloodied Marge held up an upside-down cross while whispering some ominous curse. This was a blood-soaked tactic of the Satanists. A forbidden ritual that demanded the user sacrifice not only his own life, but the lives of many others.

A Devil v.s. the Demon Lord

“May calamity rain... upon this accursed land...”

As Marge chanted this, tiny thorns burst from every surface of the upside-down cross in his hand. They punctured Marge’s palm and now gleamed with fresh blood.

“Dad... I’m sorry...”

Marge thought of his father back home. He was a skilled cobbler until the ripples of recession had dwindled his business until he was forced to close up shop. After that, Marge’s father drowned himself in liquor, became violent in the house, and even beat Marge now and again. Marge, still young, couldn’t bear to live that way, and stabbed his father to death before fleeing the village. The Satanists had found Marge during the tumbling downfall of his life. In these times, though, this was not an uncommon story anywhere.

Dark red smoke arose from the cross and enveloped Marge’s entire body. This was a ritual that summoned a devil in exchange for human sacrifice. The red smoke kept coming forth, spreading out and enveloping the bodies of the five hundred or so Satanists, in addition to Marge.

With only humans as its sacrifice, the best this ritual could summon was a low-rank devil... but thanks to the upside-down cross given to Marge by Utopia, he had successfully lured out something a step above. A very powerful being, even among the medium-rank devils.

“Summon Devil...”

The blood-colored smoke took shape, summoning the medium-rank devil, Carnival. Seeing this, the adventurers cried out. This was unthinkable. For such a monster to appear in a city full of people? In the devil-repelling Holy City, nonetheless!

“Oh... I was summoned by humans? What’s going on here?”

The two horns growing from its head, the black hair, the charcoal skin, and the face that epitomized ugliness... everything about this monster seemed to drain the life out of those who gazed upon it. In contrast, it wore a ridiculously flashy outfit, with shiny stones sprinkled all over the golden fabric. The monster

was even carrying a peculiar musical instrument on its back.

“Ah, whatever. At least there’s some good snacks... **Land of Beautyferno.**”

Activating a Devil-only skill, Carnival generated invisible walls in the vicinity. Devils preferred to toy with their prey after blocking their escape route. Whether they wanted to kill, eat, or play with their body parts, giving the prey a chance to flee wasn’t ideal. For a devil like Carnival, especially, who played instruments with the chorus of human screams in the background, any prey they allowed to escape was a loss of musical talent. Seeing Carnival, the adventurers scrambled to flee, but it was too late. The devil had already created its own space. There weren’t many things in this world that could break through that barrier. They realized that, in addition to them, the area encompassed an entire section of the Business District, along with a few thousand people.

“It can’t be, why is Carnival in a place like this!?”

“W-Wait...! We’re just adventurers!”

“Th-That’s right! We’re not members of the Church!”

“No... I don’t want a Devil to eat me!”

Hearing the harmonic crying of the adventurers, Carnival squinted his eyes in ecstasy. It was almost euphoric to him.

The residents of the Business District were quaking in fear, hiding in their homes. A vast audience on top of everything else? This was beginning to look like the perfect stage for Carnival.

“What a warm welcome... Now, which little kitty’s going to sing for me fir—... Fraghaaahhhh!”

His ecstatic speech was interrupted. A pebble had been thrown from somewhere, snapping a horn on Carnival’s head. In agony, the devil held his head and screamed. One of his horns, which represented pride, history, and everything about who the devils were, was broken by a pebble, of all things.

“Wh-Who did that!? You worm!!!”

In a completely raw tone, unlike how he had been speaking up to this point, Carnival screamed. The adventurers shrunk into their shoulders, but the culprit

sounded perfectly calm, as if he were only reading the forecast.

“Yeah, that tone’s more like it.”

“You!!! You shiteater!!!”

“...You just don’t have any class, do you? Ugly face. Ugly voice. Ugly clothes, worst of all. There’s not an inch of you pretty enough to look at, but you’re not too bad as a comedian.”

As the Demon Lord spoke this, Carnival screamed louder, further distorting his appearance. He wouldn’t give this insect the luxury of singing to his death, he thought. To crush the man’s skull with the snap of his finger, Carnival took a step forward... but stopped short. Perhaps that was his instinct as a powerful devil.

The Demon Lord opened his mouth, and solemnly spoke. His words, along with his skills... would have sent any devil running with its figurative tail between its legs.

“To tell you the truth, this is my second encounter with a devil.”

—**Survival Skill Activated: Fighting Spirit (+10% to user’s Attack and Defense)**

“The last one dropped dead without much of a fight.”

—**Combat Skill Activated: Fake Out (-10% to enemy’s Defense)**

“I wonder how long you’ll last.”

—**Combat Skill Activated: Intimidate (-10% to enemy’s Defense)**

“I’m going with my original style so I can get some more practice in.”

—**Combat Skill Activated: Equal to None (+30% each to user’s Attack and Defense)** “Carnival, was it? ...Are you ready?”

While the Demon Lord himself didn’t seem to notice, an abnormal amount of aura was emanating from him, so much so that it almost looked like Carnival was starting to shrink in comparison. The Demon Lord’s already unbeatable stats were now explosively buffed by his skills’ modifiers. A simple normal attack... could have killed a god.

“W-Wait... wait! Beautiful Monsieur! I-I’m sorry...!”

“Oh, almost forgot.”

The Demon Lord said, providing Carnival with a glimpse of hope. This nightmarish scenario was never supposed to happen. How could the world-renowned powerful devil, Carnival, be overpowered by a mere human?

“Wh-Whatever it is, I can help! I’ll help you with anything...!”

“Change Mode — **Combat Mode.**”

“Change Fighting Stance — **Retaliation Stance.**”

As if he hadn’t heard what Carnival had said, the Demon Lord switched his Combat Mode. While this Mode decreased the chance of finding enemies, it buffed all of his stats. It was highly effective when a player knew the enemy was in a certain area, or had cornered an opponent and wanted to finish the job. He also changed his Fighting Stance to create the optimal combat setup. Both of these buffed his Attack and Defense, but the most noteworthy characteristic was that he would be extremely likely to encounter enemies. Building up an unbeatable setup, waiting for an enemy to appear, and taking them down with one shot. That was the Demon Lord’s intended combat style.

But, Carnival didn’t move. How could he have? Who in this world could have initiated an attack against such an opponent?

“No... I don’t want to die... I don’t want to be killed by a human!!!”

“You’ve killed a bunch, though, right? Won’t hurt for you to see what all the fuss is about.”

Without a care, the Demon Lord approached Carnival and clamped his head, tossing him high into the air as if the devil was a baseball. The giant devil shot up into the sky with blistering speed. To the onlookers, this seemed so far off from reality. The people of the Business District had been watching the fight, entranced, when something even more astonishing took place. With a burst of white light, Sodom’s Fire erupted from the Demon Lord’s hand, piercing through Carnival. In that instance, the very sky shook, and infernal flames erupted above the Holy City, painting the night sky red. Body parts and pieces of flesh that must have belonged to Carnival fell down on the city. For a while, no one could move a muscle. It seemed like they couldn’t even make a single

sound after what they had just witnessed.

“Just like I thought... What a shitty firework.”

When the Demon Lord cackled, the adventurers, now freed from the heinous devil, burst into cheers. Drawn by their roaring celebration, the residents of the district poured out into the streets, embracing and rejoicing that they were still alive.

“Long live the Demon Lord!”

“You’re freaking nuts, man!”

“It’s like Carnival was some whining kid... What a story I’ll get to tell!”

“Let me buy you a drink, sir!”

Amidst the cheers, the Demon Lord looked around nervously. He had never guessed this was how things would turn out. Although, considering that they were just liberated from the overpowering dread of death, their reactions were only natural.

“W-Well... That was nothing.”

Fidgeting, the Demon Lord lit a cigarette and looked up at the sky. Now that it was over, the fact that he roleplayed so hard through that combat seemed embarrassing. The people he saved didn’t see the Demon Lord in that light, though. They took his words to heart, cheering so loud that he couldn’t hear what they were saying at all.

“N-Now... I’ll excuse myself. There are still attacks on the city, it seems.”

The Demon Lord tried to scurry away, but not before a mage stood in his path. The White Mage Yukikaze.

“You are...”

“...This is the second time you’ve saved my life. I must repay you.”

“No need. It was important for me to do that.”

To farm SP, of course. Yukikaze took this statement at face value and wiggled around a bit, blushing.

“...Silver Fox.”

He felt like an important word was missing from the sentence, but the Demon Lord just wanted to get away as fast as possible. But Yukikaze was looking more and more like a princess in love, although he was a boy.

“...Tell me your name, Silver Fox.”

“Sil... M-My name is Hakuto Kunai.”

The repeated ‘Silver Fox’ comment had knocked down the Demon Lord’s spirits. He whispered softly ‘the real me is still young, I swear...’ over and over with desperation, but no one in the roaring crowd heard him.

(Still, I guess a guy in his thirties fits that category for someone like her...) With a sad little thought like that, he looked up at the moon. Seeing the Demon Lord’s expression lit with a shade of gloom, Yukikaze’s heart beat faster. While the Demon Lord was intimidating, his face was far from unattractive. He had a certain sense of allure that only the biggest criminals could pull off.

“Kunai! Kunai! Kunai! Kunai! Kunai!”

Before he knew it, the adventurers around him were chanting his name. Blame it on adrenaline or the thrill of being alive, as the crowd was just liberated from looming death, their cheers only grew as they drank in celebration. The barkeeps on the street were passing out drinks to celebrate the occasion.

(What’s happening!? Give me a break...!)

Sure, the Demon Lord wanted his bad reputation gone, but he hadn’t expected this turn of events. This was becoming more and more torturous. He leapt onto a roof to flee the scene and flew into the night.

“That’s the Demon Lord, huh...?”

Mikan mumbled powerlessly as she slouched down onto the ground. After defeating five hundred Satanists in an instant, he even blew up a medium-rank Devil like it was a firecracker. He was an existence beyond human comprehension.

“...Him and I are bonded with the red string of fate.”

“W-Wait! Yukikaze... He’s tricking you, somehow!”

“...Jealous much, Mikan?”

“Why would I be jealous!? You know what? My type is more like the rumored silver Dragonborn. Someone who loves justice!”

“...How naughty. Your type is someone who loves ‘just ass’?”

“You’re doing this on purpose!!”

The threat to the Business District had been dealt with without much casualties, but the other districts were still in turmoil.

Meanwhile, a clown was approaching the high-end restaurant Artemis. Without knowing, of course, that there was a terrible witch, loyal to the Demon Lord, sitting at a table there.

A Fairy-Tale Game

—Satanists’ headquarters

“What the hell is happening...!? They shouldn’t be using it this early!”

Enraged, Utopia slammed his fist down on the throne. This man had rarely been heard raising his voice up until this point. Seeing him lose his temper, the girl next to him quietly shook.

“Marge... Has he lost his mind!?”

“I-I’m sure... Some unexpected event has...”

Utopia gave the girl shaking next to him a cold, serpent-like glare. Without a word, his eyes said it all... ‘you failure.’ The girl, who visualized the souls and emotions of others as colors, couldn’t help but avert her eyes. She couldn’t stand to look at that miserable hue.

“Tron... Take that and tell them to use the other two in front of the Holy Castle. You can at least manage that, can’t you...? You mixed-blooded failure.”

“...Uh-Uh huh...”

The girl, wearing a black Lolita outfit, walked away sulking, before glancing back at the throne just once. Perhaps she had hope for a certain response, but the one she got was a perfectly cold one.

“Get out of here, now... What an eyesore.”

Waving his hand as if to shoo a dog, Utopia looked away. He didn't even seem to want her in his field of vision. As a devil with immense powers and incredible status, the mere existence of a mixed-blood was disgusting. If he wasn't short-staffed, that little girl would have been torn to pieces by Utopia. Just like Olgan, this girl was a part Hellion.

+ + +

A clown was approaching Artemis. Not a metaphor, but a man dressed like an actual circus clown. He had deviated from his assigned group, going rogue. He was practically skipping down the street, after just having discovered that the coveted Holy Maiden was dining alone, carelessly without any guards. As soon as he had heard this tip, the clown had left the rest of the group in order to assassinate the Holy Maiden.

“This Holy Maiden must be a dumb-dumb...”

His name was Carmiya, an assassin considerably well-known in the shadowy parts of town. His M.O. was to infiltrate parties and balls wearing an innocuous costume. Most of his weapons were various poisons, blow darts, and other delayed methods of assassination. He had kept his career by sneaking away from the scene of the crime without a trace. Now, he had joined the Satanists to put food on his table, taking on the assassinations of various nobles. The Holy Maiden was on the top of his list. Peculiarly, he was an oddball even among the Satanists, as he didn't worship devils. His work was nothing more than a means to earn a living.

“So this is her abode...”

Carmiya opened the door of Artemis, mumbling some nonsense. There were a bunch of customers in the restaurant — most of them nobles — but that wasn't a problem. In fact, this was perfectly favorable for Carmiya. Nobles and other high-ranking members of society were usually the best customers of his clown act. They must have considered him an ape, or some other creature that understood their language, rather than a man. They would ridicule him without remorse, and throw change at him with some pity. A clown played an important part in stroking the egos of the nobles.

“Wow, look at all the beautiful people in here! Ah, my eyes!”

Faltering, Carmiya covered his eyes in a conspicuous gesture. He acted as if everyone was gleaming too bright to look at them directly. The noble children giggle at his practiced, exaggerated movements.

“It’s so bright that these beautiful roses are growing from my eyes...!”

Somehow, Carmiya had produced a beautiful bouquet of roses in his hands as soon as he uncovered his eyes, as the petals gracefully danced in the air. A round of applause arose in the restaurant to praise the surprising act of entertainment. As far as the patrons were considered, this performance was produced by the restaurant.

“This is why I love Artemis. They called a clown in this emergency just to make us feel better.”

“Indeed. As nobles, we shan’t lose our composure, especially during such trying times.”

“Our valiant ancestors would laugh at us from beyond their graves if we show weakness at such a trivial incident.”

Nobles, after all, were comprised entirely of ego and bravado. They would lose face if they showed any sign of uncertainty while the patrons at the next table were comfortably enjoying the clown act. Despite their internal terror at the commotion outside, the patrons clamored with nearly too much applause and whistling. Carmiya, reading the room, went from table to table, drawing laughs with comical gestures, pulling pigeons from his hat, and even changing a silver coin handed to him into a gold coin, garnering thunderous applause for utilizing the full extent of his magic trick repertoire. No one would have imagined that he was here to assassinate someone.

Finally, he had reached the Holy Maiden’s table. Unexpectedly, the grand Madame of the city had joined her. The Madame was extremely observant, sizing up most anyone she was introduced to upon her first impression. Carmiya felt as if he was walking barefoot on a bed of nails. But, in reality, he should have paid closer attention to the *other* woman at the table, the doctor with a dangerously alluring appearance. With a gentle smile, that woman spoke to Carmiya.

“What a fun clown you are. Would you mind if I perform a little trick of my own?”

“Oh, such a beauty with a talent for magic tricks!? You’re making me jealous!”

With exaggerated movement, Carmiya bit down on his handkerchief, drawing a burst of laughter from the patrons in the restaurant. He would have made a good living as an honest clown without working nights as an assassin. Even through his act, he had kept his eyes on the Holy Maiden. But now, his gaze froze. Somehow, he was missing his entire right arm.

“Heh...? Th-That’s strange... My...”

As he gulped down some saliva clueless of what had happened, his left arm disappeared. It had been cleanly removed at the shoulder.

“W-Weird... Why don’t I have... my arms...?”

No pain. Not even a drop of blood. Still, he now had no arms. He tried to move his nonexistent arms, but couldn’t feel them at all. Just when Carmiya was about to scream, the gorgeous woman asked him with a gentle tone.

“...Was it your right arm... or left arm that you have lost?”

She laughed. In her hands, she held both of his arms.



The woman was wearing a seductive smile that any man would have fallen for. Out of his control, Carmiya's heart pounded loudly. This was nothing as sweet as a romantic moment. He had felt an overwhelming sense of death wash over him. A sense of death that was inescapable.

"B-Both... I suppose..."

"Oh, you're a greedy one. But today's your lucky day."

—*God's Hand: Stitch Together*

While he still had no clue as to what was happening, Carmiya's arms were reattached. Cold sweat gushed out of every pore on his body.

"Oh... I'm sorry, I think I mixed them up."

"W-Wait! That's not funny!"

Carmiya screamed, drawing a knee-slapping burst of laughter from the crowd. They had no clue that Carmiya's arms had actually been detached. It was all part of the show to them. In fact, most of them were impressed by Carmiya's prowess.

"That clown is quite impressive... Perhaps we should invite him to our manor at the next occasion."

"Daddy, I want him to come to our house!"

"Hm. It's not a bad idea to invite the Viscount's family to a party."

"Who does that clown work for? He could be the entertainment for our next ball."

Unbeknownst to him, Carmiya's reputation grew out of control. Still, it was tragic to imagine what was going through his mind at this moment. His left arm was where his right arm should be, and vice versa. 'Oops' didn't exactly cut it. The fact that his appearance had become so absurd aided in convincing the rest of the restaurant that it was all an act, though.

"Alright... I'll put them back the right way, this time. Aren't you glad, Mr. Clown?"

"Hrph...! Th-They're there! My arms are back!"

With his hands returned to their rightful place on his anatomy, Carmiya couldn't help but raise his hands in the air in relief. Thunderous applause was awarded to the clown for pulling off such a breathtaking trick. Aku and Luna joined in on the applause with smiles on their faces, and even the Madame was smiling. They, on the other hand, thought that the trick was planned by the Demon Lord. To reinforce that idea, Yu was whispering something in the clown's ear.

"Make sure not to lose them again, Mr. Clown. Oh, and the poison in your pocket...? Such a horrible stench. You'll have to buy the good stuff if you want to make the kill. Don't you think?"

"Y-Yes..."

"If I ever see you again, I'll make you into a sashimi plate, alive. Better watch out."

Carmiya nodded with breakneck speed, like a broken bobble-head. True, she would follow through on her threat without any hesitation, laughing along the way. Just through their brief interaction, Carmiya was sure of that.

After that, Carmiya left the restaurant as he gathered the mountain of tips thrown at him, and awkwardly waved to the patrons.

(I have to leave. I have to run... As fast as I can!)

Carmiya madly ran north on his horse, travelling all the way up to the city states. He must have been one of the luckiest men in history to have encountered the Witch and survived.

While the incident at Artemis came to a conclusion, the main event ensued. Strange things were happening in the other two attack points, too.

The Holy Castle

—Noble District, Holy City

The Noble District was also attacked by the Satanists, resulting in many casualties. Perhaps because the majority of the nobles' manors were here, the

attack was furious. As most of the Satanists were far from privileged, their hatred for nobles was deep-rooted. They set anything they could on fire and killed anyone they could, even women and children. Because the Holy Knights' Order held its headquarters in this district, the Satanists had dedicated a majority of their forces here. Amidst the humans, there were the likes of Death's Mists, Hellhounds, and Skeleton Warriors attacking the city. These were all Hellion familiars of the lowest rank, but a whole bunch of them became troublesome.

Amidst the roaring flames, a street-gang-looking woman and a giant man were running around: Killer Queen, the Holy Maiden, and Mount Fuji.

"At this rate, My Queen..."

"Fucker... What good's your mouth if you just keep drooling bullshit!?"

Queen yelled as she kicked a cursed Hellhound's head clean off of its body. Next, she slammed her metal club against a Satanist's torso to tear it into two flying pieces of flesh. Meanwhile, Fuji wore three freshly decapitated Satanist heads on his belt. They couldn't have blamed anyone for pegging them to be devils.

But then, two real devils appeared in front of the pair. Two Hunnitrap, low-ranking devils. These were devils that looked like women, who reveled in manipulating human men and pitting them against each other until they end up killing one another.

"Hey, big boy. Why don't you come in and play..."

"You stink like hell, bitch... **Asura.**"

As the words left Queen's mouth, six bombs were thrown from her hands. First, the attractive face of one of the Hunnitrap was blown to bits, before five other gaping craters were made into its body. Without even a moment to scream, the Hunnitrap fell to the ground.

"Stomach-acid-looking whore... Go fuck a rusty pole."

Queen thrust her middle finger up at the corpse. A magnificent gesture, although her methods of attack and the words out of her mouth and everything else about her were the polar opposite of how a Holy Maiden was expected to

act.

“H-How dare you... My sister!”

The other Hunnitrap attacked Queen, only to have her face grabbed by Fuji and crushed like an apple. Even as the Hunnitrap’s head turned to mush, Fuji’s expression was unchanged.

“How are the other districts doing, dumbass?”

“Lady White protects the Holy Castle, and the Church is...”

He was interrupted by an erupting inferno above the Business District, far off in the distance.

“What the fuck... Is that Luna!?”

Queen shouted, but realized that she was off the mark. Luna’s magic was extremely powerful, but as far as Queen knew, she didn’t dabble in Fire magic. If Luna was able to wield such a spell, Queen was sure that she would have bragged about it to her.

“I sensed no magic... But if that’s not a spell, then...”

Fuji also stared at the inferno spreading across the sky, unsure what to make of it. Its color, its power... All of it made this look like some calamity raining down on humanity. Even the Satanists stopped mid-riot to gaze up at the sky, dumbfounded.

At times, the momentum of battle can flip from the smallest thing. After the explosion, the Satanists had clearly begun to relent. The knights began to capture the Satanists one after another, and even nobles started working together to put out the fire, rather than just watching from their high horses. If they didn’t, the fire would have soon consumed their houses, too.

“Well, it looks like this district’ll make it...”

“Yes. Lord Harts is leading a team to contain the opposition, as well.”

“That old fuck... Did he forget how ancient he is?” Queen spat out, but this put a smile on Fuji’s face. While it was difficult for one to earn Queen’s respect, Fuji knew that the old noble had garnered a considerable amount of it from his queen.

At last, the remaining Satanists began retreating, running in a particular direction. In that direction... stood the Holy Castle.

† † †

—The Holy Church in the Common District

Olgan was laying on top of the roof, watching the battle below, unamused. She had no interest whatsoever in conflict among humans. She was only there because Mynk, her partner, was getting way into it. Even now, Mynk covered half of her face with her right hand, incanting a spell as she stared down her enemies with her left eye. For some reason, this was Mynk's preferred stance in battle. According to her, she was blessed by darkness.

"The deep darkness within me... rain down woe upon my foes...! **Holy Rain.**"

A forceful rain, full of the Holy element, rained down upon the group of Satanists. For those who worshipped devils, it must have felt like literal acid rain. Although, her line didn't quite match the nature of her spell.

Her incantation continued. For an S-rank adventurer like her, chain incantations were an easy feat.

"Heh heh heh... Humans. So brittle... **Bubble Heal.**"

A healing foam covered the heavily injured members of the Holy Church. Their wounds immediately closed, and color returned to their faces. This was one of the best healing spells, which used the Holy element... despite her rambling nonsense.

"Thank you, Lady Mynk!"

"S ranking isn't a joke... Such powerful magic!"

"B-But... What was that incantation...?"

"Shh! Can it, newbie!"

"She is a Star Player, after all. There must be a good reason for it."

"Perhaps her powers stem from that incantation..."

The members of the Church chatted on. In this world, where the pre-teen emo phases wasn't a well-known phenomenon, no one really understood what

she was saying, let alone how it applied to her world-famous status as a Star Player. Some adventurers had even taken to copying her incantations and poses.

“Follow me. Give your blood to the freezing darkness...! Charge...!”

While some of them raised a brow in confusion, the members of the Church were revitalized by Mynk’s call, and charged into the group of Satanists. It was getting confusing which side served the darkness, at this point.

“What in the world is she fighting...?”

Olgan couldn’t help but wonder out loud. Mynk’s entertainment value was part of one of the reasons she travelled with her, though. When a subtle smile formed on Olgan’s face, a blade came down from above her. For her, it was laughably slow.

“What do you want...?” Olgan replied apathetically, dodging the blade with ease. She wasn’t even surprised to be attacked, let alone angry.

“Hah... ‘What do you want?’ huh? Ms. Firebrand’s got some balls. Some pretty big ones.”

“...”

“I was just here to slice up the infamous Demon Lord. Didn’t expect to see a Firebrand. All these tickets for fame are getting me giddy. Ooh, I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Alverd, the Sword Flash. Pleasure’s all yours.”

Olgan glared at the man. As far as she knew, she had eliminated all who knew her identity. How did he know that she was a Firebrand?

“Some pathetic Hellion I chopped up in a dungeon up north told me... about a little mixed-blood loser... Woah!”

Alverd dodged the knife Olgan threw without a word. It flew at a considerable speed, but Alverd had the chops to deal with it. He had a lot of confidence for someone facing off against a Firebrand and world-famous Star Player.

“Four stars... Not bad for a B-rank.”

“More power means less freedom. It’s all about the balance.”

As Olgan had pointed out, there were four blue stars on Alverd's armor, special made from Blue Steel, a rare metal. Adventurers are given more stars as they climb the ranks. The lowest ranking rookies have none, until they reach E ranking and receive their first star. Most adventurers never made it that far, and went back to their day jobs. In this world, only a select few could break through the limitations of their natural talents.

"Well, then... You wanna play, Mademoiselle?"

"You snot-nosed..."

When the pair faced off, an incredible explosion erupted in the sky above the Business District. They couldn't help but shift their attention to it.

"W-Woah... Little girl. You didn't call over your Hellion friends, did you?"

"Shut your mouth if you don't want your heart eaten still beating."

"That's too far, yo... That flashy outfit's gotta be...!"

Alverd's trained eye spotted the gold outfit in the far distance. This made him think. If Carnival was in the center of that explosion, whoever did that to him was something incredible.

"D-Don't tell me that's the Demon Lord I've been hearing about? It doesn't look like you're the one who called them here, Mademoiselle...! Woah! You've got some sticky fingers!"

"Don't get distracted during a fight..."

A number of whirling pulses of magic emanated out of Olgan. The immense magic caused her cloak to flutter. Still, Alverd's confidence didn't falter.

"Crumble the void, and show me the way... **Abyss Beam.**"

"...You gotta be kidding me! A class 5 spell!?"

The whirling magic converged into one point, firing a beam of black light. Alverd rolled off the roof to just barely dodge the blast, which pierced through the houses in its path, leaving behind a circular hole in wall after wall as far as the eye could see. Watching Alverd stumble to the ground, Olgan laughed. One of them was standing tall on the rooftop, and the other looked like a dog in a ditch.

“That’s where you belong... Doggy.”

“Heh... Heh heh... Dogs are pretty scrappy, you know? Then, when you least expect it, they go for your thro-... Dang! Hold on a sec, let me finish!”

Cackling, Olgan continued firing spell after spell, which used the Black element, an elevated form of the Dark attribute. She seemed to be toying with him, rather than trying to kill him.

“Come on, run. I’m being a nice master and taking you for a walk.”

“What a twisted kid! Who raised you like this!?”

Hearing that, Olgan’s expression changed. Any semblance of Olgan’s rationality had gone out the window. The topic of Olgan’s parents was an absolute taboo to her.

“Never mind... I’ll boil you alive.”

“N-No thanks...! The only place I’m going to die is on top of a hottie!”

“Scum...”

Just when Olgan was about to fire another spell, an outburst of confusion and cheers burst out from the direction of the Holy Castle. Everyone was shouting about the same thing...

“It-It’s the Dragonborn!!”

The battle that had suddenly began in the Holy City... was about to reach its climax.

Righteous Hero

—In front of the Holy Castle

The surviving Satanists from the groups that attacked the Noble and Common Districts were now converging in front of the Holy Castle. While they had done considerable damage to those districts, the Satanists had suffered devastating casualties, too. The most unexpected event of the attack was that not a single member of the group who attacked the Business District had returned. Their

plan was to cease the attacks at a certain time, and use the three upside-down crosses together. Losing one of them was a huge wrench in their masterplan. One group being chased by Queen and the other by Mynk, the Satanists were herded into this location. The two Satanists who each led an attack team gave each other a look. Then, holding a cross in their hands, they each shouted as loud as they could:

“Summon Devil...!”

A thicket of thorns sprung up on the crosses, as black fog enveloped the leaders and the rest of the Satanists. A bigger, more powerful one than when Carnival was summoned. In exchange for two crosses and nearly seven hundred lives, a high-rank devil appeared... Allit, the Duke of Darkness. Unlike Carnival, this was a powerful devil, adorning a classy tailcoat-like garment. His sickly, pale skin didn't have a single blemish. On his head was an attractive face and hair that reached down to his waist, which was also a bright white, and on his back were beautiful black wings. He appeared to be more noble than any of the nobles in the city.

“Oh, I've been called to quite an annoying place.”

Allit frowned, noticing the Holy Castle directly in front of him. It was encased in layers upon layers of holy barriers, crafted from the blood and sweat of the Wise Angel and other angels. Just standing next to it would have been agonizing for any devil. As for Allit, he couldn't help but feel a wash of lethargy and discomfort. It was only natural, since these barriers were laid out to increase their brightness and strength to match the power of the potential invader.

“Really... Annoying...”

Still, Allit showed no signs of moving from there. He couldn't control his hatred for the force he sensed in front of him, and the very castle. He would have already smashed it to pieces if he could have. The urge to break through the barriers and tear what's inside to pieces was becoming uncontrollable... as if he even tried to control it.

“The Duke of Darkness... What the fuck is happening...?”

Queen ran onto the scene, and fell speechless upon seeing Allit. There was no way that this devil had any right being in the realm of humans. However, Allit

spotted Queen and returned her disgusted reaction. The already-annoying situation had gotten several times worse for him.

“And now that wretched angel’s hound... **Influence the Public.**”

“Close your eyes, shitheads...!”

As Allit’s eyes glowed red, Queen shouted. She had sensed him activating a skill in that instant, but her voice reached Fuji and the knights a second too late, as they were blown away.

“Who told you to walk on two legs, puny ants? **Land of Beautyferno.**”

He activated the skill reserved for devils. Invisible barriers secluded an area around him larger than when Carnival had activated the skill, excluding the Holy Castle.

“Listen up! Everyone make it to the Holy Castle!”

“You think I would allow such a thing?”

Allit shrugged with open arms in front of the castle. His aesthetic appearance made every pose he took photogenic. But his attractive face twisted yet again. An extremely powerful being wielding holy powers had entered the vicinity.

“Duke of Darkness... I see, darkness beckons darkness.”

Mynk, the S-ranking adventurer and Star Player. She was one of the best wielders of Holy magic in the continent. The Holy Maiden, a Star Player, and the Holy Castle’s barrier. For Allit, this was becoming an unbelievably unfavorable situation. Yet, he stood his ground... He was determined to tear to shreds the loathed existence he could sense within the castle. Realizing that Allit had no intention to retreat, Queen approached Fuji, who had been knocked down, and flipped his large body onto his stomach with her leg.

“...It has been a while.”

Queen grabbed the Hammer of Sigma from Fuji’s back. This was one of the most coveted legendary weapons in the continent for producing some simple spells in addition to its high Attack. The very instant she grabbed the hammer, Queen slammed it into Allit. The devil deflected the blow with his hand, but his face twisted in pain. Inflicting that much pain onto a high-rank devil was an

impressive feat for a human.

“Such an undignified lady... **Dark Beam.**”

With no incantation, Allit fired a class 4 spell. However, the hammer in Queen’s hand emanated light to block it...!

“Protect me already. **Wall of Light!**” Queen spat out to her revered legendary weapon as if she were ordering around a slave. The wall of light clashed with the black beam, but the wall couldn’t stop it entirely, as it still pierced Queen’s body. Allit was ready to fire off the next step without giving Queen a second to breathe, but he ended up canceling the spell to deal with an interruption. Mynk charged over and swung her cross-like weapon down on him. Allit shielded the attack with his hands, but white smoke came out of his hands. Mynk was wielding an extremely dangerous weapon for devils: another One-of-a-Kind weapon called Twinkle. As a wielder of the Holy element, this was the perfect weapon for her.

“Ha ha! ...Not too bad, milk jugs!”

“M-Milk... What are you...!?”

“Humans...!” From this point, Allit was always on the back foot. The match-up and the location were not on his side. Ordinarily, he would have never stuck around, and instead would have tried to take his opponents on at a different location. However, even the collected Allit couldn’t contain the wrath boiling from the pit of his stomach. The lair of the arch-nemesis of all devils, whose very existence was carved into their DNA... was in front of Allit’s very eyes.

Once Queen had engaged the devil in close combat, Mynk incanted another spell.

“I am the wearer of blood-spatter black... **Angel Garb!**”

A holy armor materialized on Mynk’s entire body. Allit groaned at the painful light emitted from it. For him, the light seemed to carve his soul away just by looking at it. With a powerful anti-devil buff on her, Mynk joined Queen and slammed her weapon against Allit. The Holy element invaded his body, as Allit’s Dark element retaliated against the two warriors. As they clashed once, twice, and thrice... all three of them were worn out worse and worse. Considering the

match up, this was like punching each other bare-knuckled with no guards up. Allit's unfavorable situation was only getting worse with time. If things kept going at this rate, the pair of warriors would surely defeat him.

But then, a black liquid fell from the sky and splattered on the ground. They looked up to find a girl floating in the air. Tartarus had been dropped out of the open box in her hand. The black liquid spread wide in an instant, reaching the feet of Queen and Mynk.

"Fuck... Not again..."

"What!? What's Tartarus doing here!?"

Their strength drained, they crumbled to the ground. Perhaps from draining so much power, the Tartarus was far more powerful than before.

"Puny... Humans!"

Allit kicked Queen as she was curled up on the ground, sending her tumbling. Then, he stretched out the claws on his right hand and tore at Mynk.

"This is the end... **Abyss Beam.**"

He fired a heinous class 5 spell that shot through the two warriors and so many buildings behind them, crumbling the cityscape to the ground.

"You thought the barrier alone would lead to victory...? Human scum."

The two couldn't even react to Allit. Witnessing the defeat of a Holy Maiden and an S-rank adventurer, the crowd fell silent. To boot, Allit was healing with every second because of Tartarus.

"Queen!"

"Stay back, sis... Hold that damn barrier...!"

White couldn't help but come down to the entrance to the Holy Castle, but Queen shouted for her to remain where she was. The barrier on the Holy Castle would lose much of its effect if there were no Holy Maidens inside. If that were to happen now, the Holy Castle would surely fall.

"Let us begin a wonderful feast. Now, pay for the sin of irritating me."

Allit stomped his foot down at Queen's midriff, and the sound of shattering

bones echoed. Then, he grabbed Mynk by the neck, and held her up, punching and punching and punching her all over. There were a million more effective ways to damage it, but he seemed to want to tear the wretched armor apart with his bare hands.

“Y-Your darkness... is nothing... to me...”

“Silence, bug.”

With every moment, Tartarus spread, as the ruthless beating ensued in front of the Holy Castle. Each blow was calculated as to not kill his victims easily. While Allit was ordinarily very logical and kept his cool, he was undeniably a devil, after all.

(What the... You gotta be kidding me...!)

After finally arriving at the Holy Castle, the Demon Lord was dismayed by what he saw. He had made his way up a clock tower that seemed safe enough to scout out the situation. From there, he spotted the crazy Holy Maiden of Fury Road and a strange monster, which he assumed to be another devil.

(And that chick... Guessing by what she’s wearing, she’s the last Holy Maiden.)

Noticing the Holy Maiden shouting something from the entrance of the castle, he felt a shiver go down his spine. She looked absolutely gorgeous, too, but seeing how Luna and Queen turned out, the Demon Lord doubted the third sister was anywhere near normal.

(Goddammit... I can’t have some monster acting like he owns the place!)

He had research to do and a business to start. All of that would go out the window if Holylight was torn to shreds. On the other hand, to avoid red tape down the road, he couldn’t waltz on out there in front of everybody.

(Right...!)

A lightbulb sparked above his head...!

(Of course. Just have *him* handle the mess of dealing with the Holy Maidens.)

A biker from a bygone era came to mind. What’s more, he knew that the Holy Maiden in apocalypse gear had some feelings for Zero. Fight fire with fire. Having successfully resolved this seed of a headache, the Demon Lord

cheerfully pulled up the Admin screen.

(I gain back control after a while, anyway. All's right with the world.)

As he made up his mind, a bright burst of white light emanated from the roof of the clock tower, illuminating its surroundings. It looked like a page from a myth — the light to defeat darkness. Allit squinted at the light, and even the residents, who were quaking in fear near the action, stared in disbelief. They had to imagine that the Angel itself had been summoned.

Who appeared from that light was a man wearing a bright-white biker's jacket with a giant silver dragon on its back. No angel at all, just a Bosozoku. His hair, dyed silver, waved in the wind. Everyone watching was fixated on the dragon that had just emerged from the light.

“Zeroooooooooooooo!”

Seeing him, Queen cried out in complete disregard of her situation. Despite her serious injuries, she seemed to have forgotten all of her pain. Seeing her, Zero gave a subtle grin. Whenever he saw her, she was curled up on the ground, being attacked by black liquid.

“What's up...? Getting bullied again?”

Zero had no clue what situation he had been summoned into. The cityscape, as far as the eye could see, was completely unfamiliar, and, laughably, there was even a medieval-style castle ahead. Everyone in his field of vision looked foreign. Since many of the Game's players were foreign, he came to a conclusion.

“Just another arena, courtesy of the fucking Empire, huh...? Guess that weird monster's the gravy on top.”

At this point, he thought, he would not be surprised by anything the Empire did. That wacked-up country gathered wacked-up people and devastated the world with its wacked-up military. In later iterations of the Game, they had begun experimenting on various animals, in addition to humans, and had started sending chimera-like creatures into the arena to attack players. No one from that world would have been surprised by any sort of monster the Empire might have created.

“What... are you? Where did you come from?”

Allit couldn't help but ask. Even a high-rank devil couldn't quite gauge Zero. An eerie uncertainty. Without answering, Zero hopped off the roof and approached Allit. Much to Allit's surprise, Tartarus avoided Zero's steps. Parting the black sea, the dragon approached. Everyone gathered in front of the Holy Castle watched on, forgetting to breathe. As he approached Allit, his glare grew sharper. Finally, they were nose-to-nose... when the dragon grinned.

“You stink... like a murderer.”

Allit swung its claws without a word. Zero ducked to dodge it, and kicked the devil's gut without much care. The prideful high-rank devil flew a few meters up in the air, a muddied footprint imprinted on the middle of its extravagant outfit.

“Y-You...!”

Already, blue flames flared from Zero. He had activated his special ability, Mad Flurry. However, his true strength lay with something else. As if to boast that fact, Zero turned his back to Allit, showing off the dragon he carried. In mid-combat, nonetheless.

“Carrying the title of undefeated, I've made it to the road of never-ending battle! — **Righteous Hero!**”

(+5 Damage for every kill the target has made. Max. +50)

Shouting something cringey, Zero was enveloped in crimson flames as his Combat Skill, Righteous Hero, activated.

“How crude... Was that supposed to be some sort of incanta—aaaghghhh!”

Now it was Allit's turn to let out a crude scream. Before the devil knew it, Zero's left fist had punctured his gut. In an instant, his right fist whirled at Allit's face...! The devil was blown away, carving away chunks of the ground and crashing into a now-evacuated chapel. After such an impact, numerous cracks ran up the walls until the entire building came crumbling down.

“Grr...Aggh...!”

Allit looked devastated as he crawled out of the rubble. His hair mangled, and his extravagant outfit covered in dirt. What's more, tears were pouring from his

eyes. A high-rank devil, with a moniker like Duke of Darkness, was crying in front of humans. The crowd fell speechless.

“You’re scum for making a chick cry... I’ll show you just how pathetic you are.”

With a vicious smile, Zero swung his right arm in a big circle. Seeing his gallantry, the crowd of thousands of residents stirred... before finally bursting into thunderous cheer.

Do or Die

“Rgh... Gah...”

Allit was dizzy with confusion. His resilient body was screaming in agony. How did this happen? The devil failed to grasp how the fist of a mere human could produce such pain. It had punctured through numerous protective spells, hitting the devil with devastating damage. Allit felt like his very soul was writhing in pain. It wasn’t like the punch carried any Holy element, either. Nor any magic, for that matter.

“Wakey wakey...!”

Zero followed with a ruthless kick to Allit’s side while the devil was on all-fours. The high-rank devil, the Duke of Darkness, the center of flattery and adoration, was kicked away like a soccer ball... and he slammed into the barrier around the Holy Castle. In that instant, Allit erupted into flames.

“Graaghhh!”

With an explosion, sparks flew in all directions, filling the area with the smell of burnt meat. This was no surprise... a high-rank devil couldn’t have expected to walk away scot-free after touching the barrier set up by the Wise Angel. This fight had inadvertently turned into an electric cage match. The crowd went wild at the dragon who was too strong for even a high-rank devil to handle. In contrast, Zero’s mood plummeted, until he finally let out a “tsk.”

“This bastard’s got the crowd going hotter than me... You want to take on the Silver Dragon, huh!?”

The thought process of a Bosozoku. As Zero was of a species that felt ecstasy

from a roaring crowd and a spotlight, he was enraged that the attention had shifted away from him. Allit would have cried in protest at the lack of logic here, but he could not.

“You... filthy scum! **Abyss Beam!**”

With all the strength he had left, Allit fired the Dark magic spell, and the black beam hit Zero dead-on. However, after the beam had faded — the beam that should have pierced any and all things it came in contact with — an unscathed Bosozoku remained standing. As long as Mad Flurry was activated, the Duke of Darkness didn’t have enough Magic to make even a scratch on Zero.

“You think you can mess around while you’re going mano-y-mano against me?”

With his frown tightening, Zero’s unreasonable wrath piled on. Now thinking that he was being toyed with, Zero quaked with anger. From his perspective, it must have felt like he was shot at with a toy ray-gun, or something. From Allit’s perspective, this was an utter nightmare.

“H-How could this be...!? I am too noble to lose to this wretch...!”

Spreading the wings on his back, Allit flew up into the air. Then, he approached Tron, the Firebrand who had been watching the battle from above, and pierced her with a single stab of his hand.

“Heh... ah...”

Allit raised Tron’s body and drank her blood as it spilled out. Allit was using Bloodlust, one of its skills. Against a human, this would have almost no benefits, but Allit could expect to heal somewhat by consuming the blood of a Firebrand.

“Filthy blood... The stench...”

Tron was tossed aside like a piece of trash, crashing to the ground. With enough damage to obliterate her stomach, her life was quickly fading away. Amidst her faltering consciousness, she wondered... why she had been treated this way. For as long as she could remember, Tron had no parents. Desperately, she had survived the relentless discrimination and constant violence in Hellion territory by drinking mud and eating rotten pig carcasses. Sometimes, she even reached for poisonous herbs. Even after fleeing to human territory, she was

greeted with persecution. With nowhere else to go, she was picked up by Utopia, only to be treated and looked down on like a sack of garbage, just like she had been for her entire life. Why was she even alive? These were the fruitless thoughts that ran through the girl's mind. She couldn't help but whimper in pain.

"How could that bastard do this to you...? Hey, kiddo. You alive?"

The girl saw the Silver Dragon. The last thing she would ever see... At least, that's what she thought.

"Hey, open your mouth. Can't you hear me, kid?"

Forcing the girl's mouth open, the dragon threw something in it. Sooner than the girl could feel a strange texture and subtle sweetness on her tongue, her punctured abdomen began healing up at a remarkable speed. If he told her she just drank dragon's blood, she would have believed it.

Now there was no pain and no bleeding. This was so much more than closing an open wound — this was an incredible effect to behold, as if the course of time had been reversed. What the dragon had shoved into the girl's mouth was a 100 Lives Bar, a healing item from the game. Despite its ridiculous name, it amazingly healed 100 HP. In this world, common medicinal herbs healed about 1 to 3. Even the most expensive potions used by adventurers healed no more than 10, so healing 100 HP instantly was unthinkable. Naturally, anyone in the crowd would have believed that he had given the girl dragon's blood, fabled to heal any illness or injury and even to grant immortality. Allit watched the impossible phenomenon with horror.

"Are you... of a new species of dragon...? How could this be...!?"

Screaming, Allit came to a certain conclusion. That the dragon must die, right here and now. It was difficult to even imagine the chaos this dragon would bring to Hellion territory if given the chance. Inserting both hands into his torso, he tore himself apart as if to open a saloon door.

Meanwhile, Zero made sure that the girl's wound had healed, and wore a relieved expression. However, the girl remained emotionless and gloomy.

"Why the long face, kid? You survived, give smiling a try."

“Smile...? I forgot how to, a long time ago...”

The girl squeezed this out as if she were coughing up blood. Zero frowned, unsure of what to do. Then, sensing some movement behind him, he grabbed the girl by her collar and tossed her into an alley. While he wasn't gentle about it, he tried to keep the little kitten out of the fight.

Zero turned around to find that Allit had torn his own body apart... and was now turning it inside out. What emerged from Allit was bats. Hundreds, thousands, countless bats were clustered together, forming a shape. The ominous sound of flapping wings could be heard, and two eyes could be seen glowing in crimson. This was Allit's true form. The devil's physical capabilities drastically increased in this form, but in turn, it was now extremely vulnerable to the Holy element, which was why Allit rarely went this far.

“Pesky dragon! You will be judged for your arrogance of feigning neutrality!”

Even as Allit blasted Zero with obvious intent to kill, the dragon's attention was with the girl behind him. Even Zero could tell that she had lived a terrible life. He, too, had not lived an easy life.

“Smile, kid. No matter how tough it gets, the strongest guy's the one laughing like a dumbass.”

Since she was behind him, Zero couldn't tell the expression she gave in response. He could only sense her hold her breath for a moment.

“You think you have a chance while dividing your attention, Dragon...? Now die with your arrogance!”

Allit exploded into a charge. He flew so fast that the air around the devil screamed as if being torn apart. As Zero prepared to counter, his iconic silver flames roared about him. The dragon shouted as loud as he could...

“...Heavens, watch me roar! **Do or Die!**”



The dark void and silver sun clashed, head on... for only a moment. While the city stood silent as if the world had stopped spinning, countless cracks ran through the giant black void, until the entirety of it shrieked and dissolved into black mist. The skill Zero had used was a game-breaking skill that added 10 damage to his attack for each person his enemy had killed before. His ultimate attack, with the ceiling set extremely high at 500 damage. A devil with countless kills on his record stood no chance against this move. Zero stood for a few moments, holding his pose at the follow-through of his punch. Then, he thrust his fist up into the sky, holding up his index finger... An animalistic display of 'who's number one!?' and a pose to hold for the crowd that had gathered. Seeing this, the crowd went from silence to screaming and throwing their fists into the air. Hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands of residents followed suit, roaring with cheers. The rolling wave of cheer spread to other districts, and soon, the entirety of the Holy City was wrapped up in the whirlwind of excitement.

"How's that, kiddo...? Remember how to smile, now?"

Zero smiled, which he didn't do often, the smile of a teenage rebel. The girl in the alley stared back at him wide-eyed for a while, before finally nodding as tears began to streak down her cheeks. Then, she couldn't seem to contain herself as she ran to Zero, and jumped onto him.

"Ha ha! You got the pep back in your step, kiddo."

"...Not Kiddo. Tron."

"Tron? That's a funky name..."

As Zero muttered this, his back was met with something soft. Queen had embraced him, blushing. Out of context, she looked very shy. Even though Zero was carefree with a girl of Tron's age, he couldn't help but lose his cool at this. He was an old-fashioned Bosozoku, an extinct species of men with traditional values.

"H-Hey... I can't let a woman... not in public...!"

"I never want to let you go..."

Queen held him tight with a dreamy expression. In turn Zero blushed as he

felt her soft breasts pressed up against him. Queen being a perfectly tame and beautiful girl in Zero's presence made her all the more dangerous.

"G-Get off me! A guy can't be seen in public with a chick like..."

"Sir Zero... The dragon on your back is so rugged... Just like your chest..."

Queen's fingers crawled up Zero's toned pecs, making him jump. The cool fighter was nowhere to be seen, now. The tens of thousands of spectators reacted with laughter, completely destroying the darkness that had been looming over the Holy City moments earlier.

And so, the two contrasting rumors of the appearance of a Demon Lord and the appearance of a silver Dragonborn, a defeater of evils, spread throughout Holylight. In fact, the rumors eventually spread out of the country and into neighboring nations. The grand confusion and misunderstanding brought about by this one man would reach the far corners of the continent, triggering a world-wide commotion... But that's a little ways down the road.

Side Story: The Golden Heartbeat

The Holy City, ten years ago...

"Come on, run faster!"

"H-Hold on, Luna!"

Two kids were running and weaving through the Business District. Luna, still a young child, and her friend Eagle. They were both only six at the time, wearing dusty rags. Luna was living at the orphanage, still far away from the glitz and glamor she would encounter later in her life. Dust covered not only their clothes, but their faces and hair, too. Eagle had her hair cut as short as a boy's. The workers at the Orphanage must have kept it as short as possible to get away with a little less work.

"If we don't hurry, all the bread will be gone!"

"I-I know, but...!"

They were holding a single bronze coin together, which was a rare occurrence. Normally, kids at an orphanage would have never come in contact

with any money, but they had been given this 'allowance' from a Holy Maiden. The children planned to buy a loaf of bread with it and revel in that luxury.

"With this, we can buy a black loaf!"

"Yeah!"

A black loaf was barely a loaf of bread. Hard as a rock, it couldn't even be chewed without dipping it in some sort of soup. Even that, however, was seldom seen on the dining table at the orphanage. The kids were only given the bare minimum of random grains and discarded greens. Their meals were closer to cow or pig feed than human food.

"...I can't stand it."

"What?"

Luna had stopped suddenly in front of a certain restaurant. It was Artemis, one of the most exclusive restaurants, even by the Holy City's standards. Wealthy merchants and nobles flocked here each night and day, enjoying a meal that peasants could only dream about.

"One day... I'm going to be able to eat here whenever I want..."

"Hee hee. That's too much even for you."

"Your problem is that you always give up before you even try! That's why you're such a loser!"

"What do you want me to do...?"

An orphan dining at Artemis. That was an impossible feat, even if hell were to freeze over. That being said, Luna was entirely sincere. She had been devoting her life and soul to magic training in order to find a way out of her current circumstances.

"Woah. What are these filthy peasants doing here?"

"At least walk along the edge of the street so we don't have to see trash like you."

"This is the problem with our Holy Maidens right now. They have too much mercy for the lowlives."

A group of nobles came out of the restaurant at a bad timing for the two girls. The nobles made a gesture as if to shoo away a couple of stray dogs. Eagle immediately lowered her head and tried to leave, but Luna stared right back at them.

“Ugh, see that look of disobedience?”

“Smells like swine... Now our meal is ruined.”

If a noble were to kill a lower-class citizen on the streets, much less an orphan, no one would have batted an eye. Eagle tried to pull Luna by the hand to get away, but she showed no sign of backing down. In fact, she declared brazenly: “...I’ll make you regret it.”

“Did you say something?”

“One day, I will be accepted into the Holy Church. And one day, I will become a Holy Maiden. When I do, I will make you regret everything you’ve just said.”

“Crazy rat. There’s only so much crap you can spew before...”

The noble stopped there, as magic sparked out of Luna — more magic than any child should have had control over. What’s more, her magic was of blinding Light. The nobles couldn’t help but take a step back.

“Wha!? How...?”

While anyone could possess Magic in this world, the talent to wield it was another story entirely. No matter how much effort an average Joe put in, there was always the impenetrable wall of natural talent. Just like not all baseball players could become Babe Ruth or Derek Jeter.

“I should ask for your names.”

“H-Hmph! We shan’t give a peasant like you the satisfaction!”

Intimidated by Luna’s unbelievable potential for magic, the nobles scurried away. In reality, with enough talent, there was a path for someone like her to get out of the orphanage and into the Holy Church or Holy Knights’ Order. Realizing that there was a chance for Luna to follow up on her threat, the nobles hurried away in fear.

“L-Luna... That was so dangerous!”

“I can’t let them bully me... I’m going to keep working harder than anyone else in this world.”

Hard work was the motto of this country. Angels smiled down upon those who worked hard, promising them success. That doctrine... that beacon of hope had motivated Luna thus far and kept her from giving up altogether.

As they started walking down the streets again, they spotted a long line. It was for a bar called Kanpai, one popular among adventurers. It had opened as a small bar initially, but was now a mid-sized establishment after ten years in operation. Nowadays, it wasn’t rare to see a line forming at the place even during the day. Luna gave the bar an envious glare for a moment, before continuing on their path without a word. This bar had grown, not by some privilege given at birth like nobles, but by its own merit and hard work. Luna didn’t want some privilege handed down to her, either. She wanted to achieve her goals with her own hard work and merit.

“That place is always really busy.”

“...I know.”

Normally, Luna would have had a few choice words, but she was uncharacteristically quiet. Eagle saw that she must have had some ideas about the bar.

“Come on, let’s get our bread, already! I can’t even concentrate with an empty stomach!”

“You really do take magic seriously, Luna... If nothing else.”

Running through the city illuminated by the sunset, the girls ended up securing their rock-like loaf of bread.

They were softening it bit by bit, dipping it into their scrap-vegetable soup.

“Hey, Luna. Do you really think you can get into the Holy Church?”

“Offource. Who elfh buf mf...”

“Y-You can finish chewing, first...”

“Mm... I’m not going to stop at the Church. I’m going all the way to the top to become a Holy Maiden.”

Her determination shone like a rainbow. Eagle didn't dislike her friend, who always kept her gaze straight ahead and talked about her future with gleaming eyes. In fact, in a life where every day could be her last, Luna was her one shard of light in the darkness.

Noticing Eagle staring at her, Luna cleared her throat and said, from a high-horse: "Mm! Well, when I'm a Holy Maiden, I wouldn't mind making you my servant."

"Servant..."

Squire or lady-in-waiting might have been a more appropriate choice of words, but Luna was too busy trying to make it out of her environment. She didn't have time to worry about making friends on an equal footing.

"You just watch. The Angels will smile upon me!"

"Yeah. I believe they will, Luna."

"You're such a slowpoke, so you have to follow me with all you've got!"

"Hee hee... I'll try my best."

Two years past...

A messenger from the Holy Church came to Luna. As she had hoped, the Church had noticed her talent in magic, and wanted to train her closely. The Angel's doctrine did not steer her wrong. Luna told the messenger that she intended to take Eagle with her.

"I have a servant. I'm taking her with me."

"Ah, I know the one you mean."

"Oh, you did your homework. Good job."

The messenger frowned at Luna's attitude totally unbecoming of an orphan. Still, Luna had already begun to awaken her power to use the Holy element, a step above Light. Her talents were extraordinary and remarkable.

"That slowpoke... It's my big day, and I haven't seen her since yesterday!"

"That one isn't here anymore."

“She’s getting ready to welcome me at the Holy Castle, then? That might be the best idea she’s ever had.”

“That one... has been put down.”

Luna froze. She couldn’t comprehend what the messenger was saying.

“When we looked into it, we discovered that it was a demi-human. Such a surprise that it had infiltrated the Holy City.”

“D-Demi-human...”

In this world, demi-human was an umbrella term that included all species, like the Anima, Dwarfs, Elves, Giants, etc., who were not quite human. Their relationships with humans, however, were tense. Especially in Holylight, humans were openly hostile towards the demi-humans.

“B-But! She hasn’t done anything wrong!”

“Being a demi-human alone is a crime enough. I have heard that you, brazenly, aim to become a Holy Maiden... In that case, you must be careful who you associate yourself with.”

Demi-humans, in the context of the Mythical War, were in a grey area. At first, they had aided the Angels and the humans who served them. But suddenly, for some reason, they sought independence during the commotion of the war. Their pullout had drastically affected the power balance of the continent, and Animania was established in the east. If the legend was true, the demi-humans were traitors. They were like disaster thieves who founded their own nation on the back of the chaos of war.

“She’s... really dead...?”

“Did you expect Holylight to pardon a demi-human?”

Hearing this, Luna could only tilt her head, powerless. In this country that worshipped the Angels, there was no room for demi-humans. Accepting demi-humans would, in turn, be a betrayal to the teachings of the Angel, which had become Luna’s rock.

Even after joining the Holy Church, Luna couldn’t believe that Eagle was dead, and continued to search for her friend’s whereabouts whenever she had the

chance. In the end, though, she could never find her. Soon, Luna's life became even busier, leaving her without enough free time to continue her search.

Two years after joining the Church, at the young age of ten, she became a Holy Maiden. With her once-in-a-millennium talent in magic, she climbed up to become a figure adored by all. Luna's powers had evolved to Golden, stemming off of Light, making her an unparalleled mage. However, her reputation wasn't great. Some called her "Walking Pride", and others even called her an elitist monster.

(Hmph... Talk all you want. I'm climbing higher and higher.)

Luna was too loyal to the Angel's teachings, which had guided her up the ladder this far. She believed that only she, who had worked hard for what she had, was just and strong. Everyone else were lazy nobodies. She no longer had a friend to keep her in check. After joining the Church, and even after becoming a Holy Maiden, Luna was always alone. People must have seen her as unapproachable and unfriendly. As they kept walking on eggshells around her, Luna's arrogance and holier-than-thou attitude grew out of control.

Just once, though, Luna had surprised those around her with an uncharacteristic decision. This happened when her land was assigned. Dona Dona, the leader of the noble sympathizers, who didn't want the Holy Maidens getting any more power than necessary, schemed to leave Luna with some troublesome village. This village was the village of Rabbi, an isolated village where a species of demi-humans, called Bunnies, lived. The Bunnies were the only demi-human species explicitly described in any literature as to have been loved by the Wise Angel itself. Even in Holylight, where they treated any non-human species harshly, they weren't sure how to deal with the Bunnies.

"Bunnies...? All right. I'll be their lady."

"Ooh, my my... Your generosity becomes you, Miss Luna. Of course, you are a devout student of the Wise Angel's teachings."

Dona, surprised by Luna's response, still managed to drool out some platitudes. He was taken aback, as he was ready to pull all sorts of tricks to make her accept. Since Luna had no talent for politics and intrigue, Dona would have convinced her in the end no matter how she reacted, anyway.

“I am surprised, I must say. Are you not disgusted by those beasts... pardon me, demi-humans, Miss Luna?”

“Whatever. It’s better than looking at your face all day.”

“My my, that’s a good one. Some day, I think you will discover the charm of middle-aged men.”

“...Anything else? I’m busy.”

With that, Luna left her seat in a hurry. She didn’t like the beating-around-the-bush that all nobles did. Dona was a prime example of that.

(Bunnies...)

Some distant memory resurfaced in Luna’s heart. If she were stronger and had more power, she might not have lost her.

(This isn’t nearly enough...)

It wasn’t like she was on top of the pyramid. Holylight was divided into numerous factions which continued their battles under the surface. She had the two Holy Maidens above her to worry about, too. White, the oldest, who was talented in peacemaking, popular among both nobles and the common people. And Queen, the middle sister, who was talented in combat, and had begun to build her fearless private army. Taking a good look at herself, Luna was aware that she had no other power than magic. At this rate, she may very well never make it to the top.

(Wise Angel... Lend me your strength...!)

Determined, Luna started moving forward, once again.

Later on, her wish would come true. The one who lent a hand, though, wasn’t an angel at all...

“Luna, I want to borrow a plot of land in this village.”

“What?”

...But a man claiming to be the Demon Lord...

Memorial: The World Remembered, Connected, or Buried

X/X/2000

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony.

“Hey Akira, this next game...? I don’t really get it after reading the manual.”

“Each Game lasts a week. Players try to kill each other. Last one standing wins. Simple.”

“No, what I mean is... An MMO can’t end in a week.”

XX asked, and Akira replied with the bare minimum. He was working on creating said game, and seemed to want every second he could use.

“The Game starts on a Monday and ends on the next Sunday. Then a new arena starts on Monday again. No problem.”

“What about the character you grow? All that work for nothing?”

“Yep. Clean reset. If players saved progress, the long-time user will have an unfair advantage, and all the new players won’t be able to kill them.”

XX was confused. Wasn’t the fun of playing an MMO growing your own character?

“Besides, there won’t be any monsters? Like co-oping with friends to go in a dungeon or take on a dragon?”

“I am sick and tired of those lukewarm MMOs that’ve flooded the market. Dreams! Adventurers! Play with your friends! All these niceties in the game world are giving me heartburn.”

Strictly speaking, even by this time, there were MMOs with PvP (Player vs Player), but they had always been just a feature of the game. It was rare to have an entire MMO revolve around PvP.

“Live opponents, huh? It’s true that AI monsters keep doing the same thing over and over again.”

“See? There’s no variance in the fight. If you fight other people, though? They’re smart. They’ll run when they think they’ll die, they’ll set traps... They might even drag other people into the fight.”

Akira was remembering the arcade he frequented as a child. A decade or so

ago, in-person fighting games had become a massive hit, which only grew bigger by the introduction of the battle stations, where people could sit across from one another to challenge them in-game. From boys to men, people of all ages fought day and night against strangers over monitors, honing their craft.

“Fighting against a computer with a programmed set of moves gets old, no matter what.”

This was the gist of Akira’s motivation. Against other people, who knew how they would respond to each move? Less predictable. More fun. As long as they kept up the servers, the Games could go on forever.

“Right! There were some IRL fist fights at the arcade!”

“That’s what I’m talking about! The excitement and the powerful reaction to losing all happened because it was all human.”

Type type type type. The chatroom symphony.

“Now, here’s a list of features so far...”

(Tentative) Game Arena Features

- A Game lasts one week. Monday through Sunday.**
- Linked with real-world time, the fight will take place 24/7, all the time.**
- Last player standing on the last day is crowned victor.**
- Alliances are allowed, but only one may survive in the end.**
- Implement survival gameplay like fishing, material collecting and base-building, hunting and gathering, sewing, *etc.* so even players who aren’t good at combat can enjoy the Game.**
- As a bonus stage, the players can rebel against the Empire. Here, the players will work together. Players stop killing each other to work together.**
- The difficulty of the bonus stage, Sleepless Castle, is set to Inferno.**
- When the Sleepless Castle falls, the MMO will discontinue.**

“Akira, hold on! What do you mean, linked with real-world time?”

“Just like it sounds. If it’s 7am in Japan, it’s 7am in the game. Early morning,

late nights, they're always killing each other in real time."

"Wha... What about people with school and work?"

"They have to hide well or stay in their Base. They can automatically retaliate against attacks, and run away if they can."

"So... You're god at the game if you're jobless? All right!"

"No, you go get a job. And characters will use Stamina as they move, so if they don't get a lot of sleep, the characters will be out of Stamina and won't be able to move."

"Oh. So having all the time in the world won't do any good."

"You got to make calculated moves. Otherwise, you'd turn into a punching bag. That's going to suck. Being attacked without even being able to run?"

"I might just snap if that happens to me."

"Awesome. That's raw humanity, right there."

The IRL fistfights he witnessed in the arcade... To Akira, that was proof of immersion and what made the game real. And so, a world was created.

A legendary game that took Japan by storm began here...

Postscript

Thank you so much for reading the first volume of Demon Lord, Retry! I'm the author, Kurone Kanzaki. This piece was published before, but thanks to the anime adaptation, we have re-published it with new skin. I never thought I'd be the one "retrying" things in the real world. It's all because of that heinous Demon Lord...!

In the story, the Demon Lord gains influence really quickly, drawing in everyone around him. In real life, this story is kind of doing the same thing. First, winning the 5th Web Novel Award, then getting a publication. After that, a manga adaptation, and now an anime adaptation. It's incredible. I had never dreamed that the story would be aired on TV after less than a year on the market. At the moment, I'm just staying busy doing all sorts of work.

There's something wonderful about the characters and world I've created being brought to life in the real world. Come to think of it... Are we sure we can air this thing full of weirdos to the general public...? Yes! ('Cuz I said so.)

So, once it airs, I would love to have you check out the anime. This past year was really dense for me, like I was swimming in Calpico concentrate. I experienced so many things I never thought I would, and I've learned so much in that time, too. I have a vague feeling that I'll keep learning all sorts of things little by little for the rest of my years. I'm going at a tortoise's pace, but I would love to have you along for the ride.

All of my thanks to the people who've made this new edition possible. I'll be doing my best to meet your expectations.

And finally...

Once upon a time, I created a utopia with a bunch of friends. I lived a second life there, all over again. Those golden days have left me with a story, which now allows me to live a third life, it seems. I hope this story will be a fresh breath of life to somebody.



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Demon Lord, Retry! Volume 1

by Kurone Kanzaki

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